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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

SCIENCE FICTION

FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

FEATURING

PROJECT BARRIER

A Stunning Noveler

By DANIEL F. GALOYE

SHAPES IN THE SKY

by CIVILIAN SAUCER INTELLIGENCE



THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER

It seemed to never end.

There was something strange about these steps at the end of which hovered this unseen Thing. It was as if you were in space itself. First you lifted one foot, slowly, oh so slowly, and then the other, and then the first one again, and then the other, all the time feeling as if you were stepping on nothing more solid than air.

And still these stairs—these steps—even the existence of this Something—*had* seemed real when the two of them began this never-ending climb. The steps had glowed, they had seemed to beckon, and something had been whispering in the minds of each of them that there was an Intelligence up there in the shadows, a lonely intelligence, and that it was waiting for them. What form it took, what it looked like or *could* look like, was unimportant in the light of this one reality. There *was* an Intelligence up there in the mist; there were times when Forester felt it was a mocking, analytical intelligence which knew every faltering step the two of them were taking and was aware of every tremor of fear and hope as they climbed on.

The stakes could be life or death, not only for himself but for the handful of others, Lyla included, who had landed on this insane planet where every living thing seemed united in wishing they would go.

But return to Earth was impossible after all. There *was* no Earth.

Scattered groups of men and women such as these, yesterday's Empire builders—today's pioneers, were stranded throughout the Galaxy, suddenly facing the reality that the values and the mores of a world that was no more were meaningless when clutched at by these few, surrounded by vast infinity. Man had played with his bright new toys, played until the point of no return. Now these men and women, on Mars and on Venus and on planets earlier generations had not even known, had to plan not for Empire but for survival.

They'd found a strange world here on Cleo. Carruthers, the leader of the expedition, had named the glittering planet after Cleopatra, or Cleo for short. There was this feeling that even the plants were telling them to go.

And now this fantastic cavern that the two of them, he and Lyla, had stumbled on, with these steps in the centre that led up into the shadows.

Something *was* waiting up there, Forester felt, something ancient to a degree he could only sense, curious about these little people who had come to its planet, calmly indifferent to whether they would live or die.

There was silence around him now—a menacing silence—a frightening silence to a man like Forester.

He drew his gun as he continued to climb, slowly, slowly, ever nearer to the mist.....

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project barrier

by DANIEL F. GALOUBE

A sense of impending peril swept over him. He stepped back abruptly, frightened. The Cliff was advancing!

"CULTURE," said Chimur pompously, "is built on technical knowledge and social virtue. Never on technology alone. Otherwise there would be stagnation."

Self-satisfied with his dissertation, the chief ursa relaxed in his chair and complacently folded his great stubby arms.

Savorn shifted uneasily. "But that's exactly my point. Our world is some one thousand miles across and—"

"And is sorely beset," Chimur broke in bluntly, "with internal disruption. In that five-hundred-mile radius there are four hostile nations."

"You don't follow me, sir. Celestial measurements show the Shimmering Cliff encloses but a small portion of the surface of a great sphere. What's on the other side of the Cliff? What's—"

Chief Ursa Chimur brought his paw down resoundingly on the desk. "And you, sir, don't follow me. With war staring us in the face, there is little time to think of such academic issues as what's beyond the Cliff!"

Savorn glanced away impa-

Daniel F. Galouye, New Orleans newspaperman, who has been widely published in the field, introduces us here to a startlingly different civilization, developing in an all too possible Tomorrow where those who have inherited our way of life struggle against difficult odds.

tiently. He could almost see back through the curtains of time to some dim prehistoric era. There must have been many like Chimur—great shaggy beasts, sharp-taloned, long-snouted, bigoted, squatting smugly around their primitive fires, blindly proclaiming their implements couldn't be improved upon.

"But don't you see?" he pleaded. "If we could negotiate the Cliff we'd be invulnerable! If any nation attacked, we could strike back directly at its capital—from *beyond* the barrier!"

For a moment the chief ursa sat back and pensively ran his closely cropped claws against his jowl. Then he snorted. "Nonsense! I know what this is leading up to. You want more funds for your pointless research. But this time I won't go along. Not when we have to budget so much for weapons."

The Chief Ursa was quite indignant. Savorn's sensitive nostrils quivered as he detected the subtle odor of the other's anger.

"I'm on a new project, Chimur," he confided anxiously.

"So I understand. Something about breaking water down into its elements." The other disinterestedly straightened his collar.

"It's an extension of the electrolytic process. I'm refining hydrogen and oxygen."

Chimur flicked his paw disparagingly. "And of what

practical use is refining these elements?"

"Hydrogen is lighter than air."

"So?"

"If we gather enough of it in a light container, it might be made to lift an observer."

"And what," the chief Ursa growled, "will the observer observe?"

Savorn leaned forward tensely. "The thing might rise *over* the Shimmering Cliff!"

Chimur sprang up, baring his vestigial fangs. "You meddling young cub! No matter where you start, you always get back to that damned barrier!"

Savorn backed off as the other shook a trembling paw in his face.

"I'm serving warning," the Chief Ursa rasped, "that I'll fight any request for more appropriations for your bumbling research bureau!"

OUTSIDE, SAVORN disgustedly thrust his paws in his pockets and signaled for a cab. He was tall and supple, having not yet acquired the excessive proportions of ursine maturity. Cinnamon was the color of his down, vestige of a once-lush coat of ancestral hair. It made a striking contrast with the rich tan of his nose.

"Barrier Park," he directed sullenly, getting into the cab.

The vehicle backfired and stumbled off over a cobblestone street that had only a

the past decade watched the ox-drawn cart bow out in the march of progress.

The cab turned onto a broad boulevard and headed toward the Shimmering Cliff, scarcely three miles away.

Impressive was the barrier—all coruscating and pulsating, like a splendid cataract that sent its silvery water cascading down from a mile-high altitude. Breath-takingly beautiful and challenging. Derisively challenging to Savorn. He had spent half his life, it seemed, standing at the foot of the barrier, awed at its magnificence, trying again and again to push into the delightfully tingling matter-that-wasn't-matter. Always, however, it repulsed—gently but relentlessly.

Thiebok and Cella, the latter in a light print dress, were waiting at the park entrance. They cuffed one another friendlily, then withdrew to a terrace flanked by rows of tall cedars.

"Well?" Savorn prodded.

"You first." Thiebok smiled. He was not quite as tall as Savorn, but the principal difference between the two was one of coloration. Thiebok's down, which he flaunted with pretended ostentation, had a bluish cast.

Savorn glanced disconsolately at Cella. "No luck. Chimur's going to fight any more appropriations."

"Oh," exclaimed Cella sympathetically. "Does that mean the end of your work?"

He shook his head uncertainly. "The bureau hasn't been disbanded—yet."

He turned anxiously toward Thiebok. "What did you find out about Councilor Murdas?"

"Nothing. If Murdas is a subversive agent, he hasn't done anything to arouse the suspicion of the ministry of security. Cella and I haven't come across anything in our files."

"But *he* is from a border area. And he *has* been influencing the Chief Ursa to oppose more research on the Cliff."

"Quite true."

"And every time the council cancels one of the bureau's projects, we find the Southern Nation has started identical experiments."

Thiebok spread his paws. "But that still doesn't prove subversion. His convictions might be sincere. There are plenty diehards on the council."

Savorn's shoulders slumped.

THIEBOK cuffed him encouragingly. "Got to get back to the ministry before they find out I'm conspiring against a councilor. Watch it with Murdas. Don't forget, if you make any rash charges he's entitled to physical challenge. He's the *last* one I'd want to see you tie up with."

"But you'll have the ministry on your side," Cella offered hopefully, "if you can

convince them he ought to be investigated."

"That's right, Savorn." Thiebok backed toward the park entrance. "But they won't accept intuition as evidence."

Savorn watched him leave, then turned to gaze at the Shimmering Cliff. Viewed so close, it appeared to tower menacingly overhead. The vertiginous effect was almost overpowering. It seemed as though its majestic bulk was toppling over and would crush all civilization.

A lance of yellow light broke loose from the top of the glittering cataract and streaked upward until it disappeared in the azure depths of the sky. And from the unknown reaches beyond the barrier came the faint, muffled roar of thunder.

The streaking lights and rumbling sounds were not uncommon. And it must be, Savorn reflected, that they only *seemed* to surge up out of the very top of the Cliff. It must be that the barrier hid the lower part of their trajectories.

He made a mental note: Put the rumbling lights down as Barrier Research Project 1-B.

Cella cuffed him gently. "It's not all that serious, is it?" she asked facetiously.

She was tall but elegantly proportioned. There was a harmony of rhythm in her movements and, altogether conforming with the tenor of

her other features, her coloration was a warm yellowish white.

He seized her paws. "I want to get on the other side of the Cliff, Cella—more than anything else."

Her eyes laughed. "More than *anything* else?" She nuzzled his ear coquettishly and nipped him lightly on the jowl.

Then she backed off, ready to turn and sprint gleefully away should he show signs of giving chase. But the set lines of his face rejected the invitation. So she reluctantly altered her mood and stood by his side. He took her arm and they walked across the terrace.

But she drew up suddenly, pointing ahead. "What's that?"

He glanced down at the reddish-brown animal that sat on its haunches and surveyed them inquisitively. "A prairie dog. There's a colony of them in the park."

The creature ambled off in a three-legged gait and Savorn saw the reason for its limp. It was dragging a long hooked twig with its right forepaw.

Drawing up before a bed of sunflowers, it used the crude implement to pull one of the seed-heads down with in reach.

"Oh, it's darling!" Cella exclaimed.

"Witness the forgotten prairie dog," Savorn offered

philosophically. "It's got a long-standing second option to fill the niche occupied by bearkind."

She crinkled her snout questioningly.

"Unfortunately," he expanded, "only one species can hold the scepter of civilization at one time. If it weren't for that fact, we might discover that 'darling little creature' building cities alongside ours."

SAVORN THREW the switch and listened to the whine of steam-driven generators. He made several notations on a pad, then paused to survey the laboratory scene. Satisfied that everything was functioning properly, he returned to his office.

An assistant came in and laid a square of dark cloth on his desk. "Here's the sample."

Taking the material between his paws, Savorn stretched it forcibly. "We've made all tests?"

The assistant nodded. "It's the same stuff the army uses as tent material."

"Hermetic?"

"Completely. It's rubberized. Stands up under seventy-five pounds of pressure. It'll do for your hydrogen bag, all right."

"Order a hundred bolts. And have Axeru send in those samples of wire for the reinforcement net."

Savorn dismissed him and tried to get the Northeastern Production Unit on the voice-

receiver. But the diaphragm only made a squawking noise and he regretted having let them replace his sending key.

He was still shouting impatient "hellos" into the mouthpiece when his secretary announced Councilor Murdas.

Like Chief Ursa Chimur, the huge Murdas only seemed clumsily stout. Actually, untested power lurked behind his deceptive appearance of ursine plumpness. Also like Chimur, his vestigial down was dark brown.

"I've come to find out something about this electrolysis thing," Murdas disclosed perfunctorily.

"I didn't think you were interested," Savorn said guardedly, appreciating the advantage the councilor's position of authority would afford him if he were a foreign agent.

"I'm concerned with all ways in which treasury funds are spent."

Savorn led him to the main laboratory. "The work we're doing here is similar to what's being done at five other regional facilities."

HE MADE the tour short—brief almost to the point of rudeness—and they ended up at the main cell.

"Here, an electric current runs through the solution. You can see the hydrogen collecting on those cathodes. From there it's funneled off

to a chamber and pumped into portable steel capsules."

The councilor grunted his disapproval. "And this is the stuff that's going to make a bird out of bear?"

Savorn regarded him appraisingly. Why, he wondered, was Murdas *opposed* to research? If he were syphoning off the results of the results of the bureau's experiments and relaying them to the enemy, shouldn't he want to see the bureau continue?

The councilor started back for the office. "Have you ever gotten the impression, Savorn, that what you call progress is carrying us, like an overwhelming tide, toward oblivion?"

Savorn started to answer, but tensed instead. Suddenly it had occurred to him that Murdas would want to halt the bureau's research *if he knew war was imminent!* For then his line of communication would be broken and data gained from future experiments would remain the exclusive property of the Northern Nation.

"Do you realize," the councilor continued, "that two hundred years ago the bow and arrow was seldom fatal? But now, with the blessings of knowledge and progress, we can kill thousands in no time at all?"

"The bureau's function," Savorn protested, "isn't to make war more horrible."

"But your Cliff research is

intended to do just that. You're seeking a way to attack from beyond the barrier so we can inflict greater casualties."

"But I'm just using that as an argument to get more funds!"

Murdas laughed throatily. "Just like the bureau supervisor before you wanted metal-plated cars to try to push through the Cliff. We got the armored cars, all right. But they couldn't penetrate the barrier. And now what do we have?—Gun-mounted armored vehicles! It's going to be hell when they tie up with the cars of the Southern Nation."

Savorn stiffened. How did Murdas know the Southern Nation had armored cars? Intelligence had established that fact only hours earlier. And it had come as a surprise, Thiebok had confided at lunch.

SAVORN PARKED the car on the edge of the theater district and escorted Cella down the crowded sidewalk, ignoring the tug of abandon and excitement that seemed to be part of the gay night throng. He was impressed, though, at the predominance of uniforms, realizing only now that the war emergency must be serious indeed.

Cella nodded ahead. "There's your culturally precocious creature."

A cinnamon-hued music-box grinder was the center of attraction among a night-club

and theater crowd that had collected at the next corner. He churned the handle of the hurdy-gurdy, strapped to his shoulders, and a lilting tune accompanied the gyrations of a prairie dog on a leash.

The animal, dressed in a mock military uniform, pranced on its hind legs and extended a tin cup toward the delighted onlookers.

Savorn and Cella skirted the assembly and entered one of the less pretentious night clubs. They ordered honey-fizzes and he sat back reticent, staring unseeingly through the congestion of individual dancers who lurched and whirled and surged in time with the blaring orchestra.

Cella leaned across the table and gripped his paw. "You're not keeping your promise," she chided.

He started, then smiled. "But I don't have my mind on the bureau."

"Then what do you have it on?"

Her stare was severe, yet tender, both accusing and solicitous. Dim, revolving reflections threw sparkling high lights against the soft, yellow hair that fell down on her shoulders.

"You," he said, laying a paw on her arm. But then he slumped. "No, that's a lie. It's on Murdas."

"But don't you see there's still nothing you can do about him?" she asked earnestly.

"I could report he knew about the Southern Nation

having armored cars."

"Not without betraying the fact that Thiebok passed confidential information to you. That would cost him his job—maybe even a prison sentence."

SAVORN sipped his drink. "I suppose you're right," he admitted grudgingly. "If I could only find Murdas' equipment!"

She frowned. "What equipment?"

"I don't know, Cella. But he must have some way of getting information to the Southern Nation. It can't be through agents. Too risky that way. And I know he doesn't have a private telegraph line running under five hundred miles of landscape."

"But what other way is there?"

"Wireless transmission."

She drew back skeptically. "I never heard of that."

"No doubt you haven't. It was killed in the experimental stage almost four years ago. It's a theoretical way of transposing voice impulses into electromagnetic vibrations that can be sent through the air."

She hid her confusion behind a tactful burst of laughter. "I haven't any idea what you're talking about, darling."

He leaned back and laughed too—at himself for having thrust fleeting concepts of abstract science on her. Yet, he reflected soberly, that was the trouble with the world—

too many were willing to accept the comforts afforded by research while they reacted indifferently to further progress.

But science—even what Murdas has called an overwhelming tide of it—was good. It had accepted the candle in trade for the incandescent bulb; the courier for the transmission cable; the oxen for the motor car.

Cella was serious again as she reached across the table and took both his paws. "I wonder, darling, if you aren't just fashioning a paper dragon. Doesn't a councilor doubling as a subversive agent seem a bit melodramatic?"

He laced her with a protesting stare.

"Why don't you go out and dance?" she suggested. "Have fun. Don't even think about going before the council tomorrow."

"I'm thinking about something more important than that," he said obscurely.

"What?"

"Whether or not the council approves more funds, at least one hydrogen bag will be built. And I'm going to ride it over the Shimmering Cliff."

THE MEETING was uncomfortably formal as Savorn shifted restively before the challenging stares of Chimur and Murdas.

"...And even the Chief Ursa," he concluded, "has conceded that culture is built on

both technology and social virtue. So there must be more funds for new undertakings by the bureau of scientific research."

"True, I admitted that much," Chimur said. "But things are different now. We must show we are willing to practice pacifism by not pursuing more horrible means of waging war."

Several of the councilors nodded in studied agreement.

Murdas clasped his paws together soberly. "Just what are these new undertakings you're considering?"

"For one thing, we'd like to push further into the hydrogen bag experiments. Even if the device fails to rise above the Cliff, it might still be used as a means of rapid, direct transportation. Engines could be attached in some way to drive fan blades and give the thing a forward impetus."

Murdas lurched up. "Another form of intimidating the other nations! Troop vehicles that could rise *above* their lines of defense! Why must you insist on such provocations?"

Chief Ursa Chimur rapped the table. "It seems to me that if the research bureau operated under a tight control authority which would determine the course of its work, then there would be less objection to its existence."

Murdas shook his head. "That's not enough. We've got to prove our peaceful intentions. I move that we dis-

band the bureau and put research back on the plane of private endeavor where it belongs."

"What individual," Savorn asked bitterly, "could undertake anything the size of the hydrogen bag project?"

"That," said Murdas, smiling, "is exactly the point."

The motion carried unanimously.

THE FOREST was dense and shadowy and, being only a few miles from the capital, was ideally located for Savorn's purpose. It stretched like a great, green finger along the inner curve of the Cliff, ending at a point due north of the city. And the deserted shack which it concealed couldn't have been more suited to his needs had he supervised its construction himself.

Walking along the row of benches in the shanty, he watched the workers cutting and sewing, patching and pasting. When he reached the end table, he waited until Cella finished tracing the pattern for one of the lower panels of the bag.

Then he took the pencil away from her. "You're far enough ahead of the others now."

She smiled wearily and followed him outside.

Above the trees, the Shimmering Cliff soared up like a huge, quivering blanket of luminous fibers, outshining even the lunar disc.

"It's wonderful, Savorn," she said.

"The barrier," he agreed, "is the most wonderful and challenging thing in our world."

"I wasn't talking about that. I meant the loyalty of all these people from your bureau." She motioned toward the workers in the clearing who were stacking tall cylinders of compressed hydrogen.

He nodded. "They all wanted to help. I had to turn down half of them. But they understood when they realized somebody had to go through the motions of disbanding the research centers."

The deadened roar of distant thunder erupted again and again. Savorn looked up to see a whole string of brilliant lances shoot up from beyond the barrier and finally snuff themselves out in the far reaches of the darkened sky.

"That's your whole life, isn't it?" Cella asked remotely. "The Cliff and the soaring lights."

He stared into the distance. "When I was a cub, my grand-sire used to say, 'Savorn, those shooting lights are the Gods beyond the barrier going off to their alter homes among the stars.'"

He glanced eagerly at her. "Now I want to go beyond the Cliff and see if that's true."

She grasped his arm. "But,

Savorn. Even if you can get over the top, how will you ever return, with the wind blowing northward at this time of the year?"

"Do you want me to come back?"

In answer, she nuzzled his ear affectionately.

"Then I'll be back. You believe that, don't you?"

"Of course I do. Like all these workers, I have faith in you too. Would I be practically deserting my job with the ministry to come out here and help if I didn't?"

IN THE distance, a motorbike *putt-putted* along the road paralleling the forest. The sound grew louder and Savorn stiffened. But he relaxed when he realized the driver was heading too unerringly for the clearing to be anyone but a member of the secret project.

The cyclist finally broke into the glade and cut off the engine. It was Thiebok.

"Sorry I couldn't get away sooner," he explained as Savorn and Cella came over, "but intelligence is going full blast. How's the barrier effort coming along?"

"We'll be ready to go in a few days."

"Will you have enough hydrogen?"

"Yes, with the cylinders we were able to pull in from the regional centers."

Thiebok drew back and stared up at the Shimmering Cliff. Its gentle coruscations,

like blobs of greenish-white fire chasing one another up and down the luminous surface, gave an eerie cast to the blue down of his face and bare arms.

He glanced toward the center of the clearing, with its winches and ropes for holding the bag down until it could be filled. And his snout wrinkled meditatively.

"Won't the hydrogen keep lifting the bag? How will you get back to the surface, provided there *is* a surface on the other side?"

"There'll be a valve in the top to release a little of the gas at a time. The bag should float down gently.

The other nodded thoughtfully.

"Are we still safe out here?" Savorn asked.

"I don't think they suspect anything. At least, security hasn't gotten any orders to investigate 'curious activity' at a shack in the forest."

Reassured, Savorn fixed the barrier with a mocking stare.

Thiebok dropped a paw across his shoulder. "I sometime wonder whether you aren't attaching too much significance to the Cliff. There are other barriers, you know—just as provocative."

Savorn squinted at him.

"There's the barrier of the past that hides the origin of the ursine race. The barrier of the future, concealing the destination of bearkind. And all the barriers of social and political differences that di-

vide us into antagonistic nations."

"What are you trying to say?"

"That the council might be right. Maybe we should leave the Shimmering Cliff alone until we've overcome the barricades that exist *within* our world."

Thiebok mounted his motor-bike and drove off. After the silence of the night had folded over the staccato of his departure, Savorn took Cella's arm and they strolled through the forest to the base of the Shimmering Cliff.

A meteorlike flash flared in the sky and he glanced up to watch a long, thin lance of pure white fire plummet earthward—*on this side of the barrier!*

It struck the flickering Cliff a glancing blow, perhaps three miles to the east, and hit the ground in a jarring crash.

"Come on!" Savorn shouted. "We might find out whether grand-sire was right!"

IT WAS more than three miles. Remembering that the sound of the impact had been negligible, Savorn realized he had underestimated the distance. Daylight came before they reached the site and he was surprised that no one else had been attracted.

"What is it?" Cella asked uncertainly.

He stood off and studied the huge metal object that

lay like an elongated cracked egg at the base of the Cliff. "Look at the symmetry, the workmanship! We can be sure, at least, that the soaring lights are products of intelligent paws."

The ground was charred naked in a great circle around the thing.

"I'll stay and watch, Cella. You go back to the road and get to the nearest voice station. Tell Chimur what we saw."

After she left he circled the object, cautiously delaying a direct advance. But there was no motion, no sound within.

Sniffing gingerly, he went up to the thing and felt the warm metal of its outer surface, the slightly raised ridges here and there that suggested some sort of welding process.

Near one end of the crumpled ovoid, he found a rift in the metal skin almost large enough to force his head through. He stared in, then drew back, dumfounded.

In a corner on the other side of the compartment was something—*alien!* It roughly resembled a bear, having two arms, two legs and a head. Even the facial features were similar, except that where a snout should have been was only a blunt projection of the jaw. Apprehensively, he sniffed the unursine smell that pervaded the interior of the vessel.

Clothed in material not unlike the familiar garments of bearkind, the other creature was motionless in death. On the exposed parts of its flesh there was no fuzz. And its color was light tan, almost white.

A sense of impending peril swept over Savorn and he lurched away from the vessel. The Shimmering Cliff was advancing!

Like a menacing, boiling bubble, a huge section of the barrier was pushing out toward the thing that had once been a soaring light!

Frightened, Savorn backed off and watched the glittering protuberance sweep over the ovoid. Then, furiously, he attacked the outcropping of barrier substance, trying to force it away from his prize.

But his efforts were futile. Frustrated, he could only stumble back and watch and wait.

It was past noon when the bulge withdrew into the barrier, leaving bare the ground which it relinquished. Savorn went forward groping, as though his paws might encounter the soaring light thing that was no longer there.

CHIMUR PACED restlessly, his great brown bulk ambling over the charred area. Three other councilors and a score of civil police, army personnel and security agents moved methodically over the ground, searching, prodding.

The Chief Ursa halted suddenly and swung around to face Savorn and Cella.

"I don't believe there was anything here at all!" he erupted.

"But look at the ground," Savorn pleaded.

"You could have burned it."

"And that hole?" Savorn indicated the impression left by the impact and weight of the vessel.

"You could have selected just such a natural configuration and centered your fire around it to give weight to your story."

Savorn thrust his arms up futilely. "Don't you believe her either?" He gestured toward Cella.

"We did—until we got here."

One of the councilors, a paw raised tentatively to the tip of his snout, confronted Chimur.

"It seems to me," he said, "that such a story as a disabled out-of-this-world vessel being pulled through the Shimmering Cliff might be intended to stimulate interest in further barrier research."

Nodding his concurrence, Chimur eyed Savorn speculatively. "If you didn't plant this hoax, just what were you doing out here?"

Savorn tried to hide his abrupt confusion. He'd failed to foresee that he might be called on to explain his presence in the forest. "I—I—"

But Cella spoke up calmly.

"Savorn and I were— We came out here last night and— Well, you see—"

She put on a thoroughly convincing display of humiliated guilt which, Savorn realized, could be dispelled only at the expense of disclosing the hydrogen bag project.

Several of the security agents were exploring the fringe area of the Cliff, pressing against the shimmering substance, forcing their way into the repelling barrier as far as it would let them.

Chimur laughed derisively. "If this alien creature is as monstrous as you say, then it's just as well that it was taken out of our world."

Savorn ignored the taunts of the other councilors and went over to the Cliff. Determined, he pushed into the glistening, tingling mass until he was completely engulfed and could go no farther against the fiercely repelling power.

As he relaxed finally in defeat and let the matter-that-wasn't-matter force him back, his foot caught in something firm, thin, vinelike. Straining, he reached down with an exploring paw and felt the cable pegged to the ground every few inches so that it wouldn't be repelled into the open—a *transmission cable!*

The significance of his discovery burst in on him: A line hidden in the fringe area of the Shimmering Cliff would be ideal for transmit-

ting subversive information away from the capital area! If he traced it back to the city, would he find Murdas at its terminus?

He let the shimmering mist eject him.

"It could be more serious than a mere hoax, Chimur," one of the councilors was saying. "It might be an attempt to divert us from the war effort."

The Chief Ursa turned angrily on Savorn. "I'm not having you taken in custody at present—not until I've had time to consult the statute books. But you're going to get cuffed every way the law allows!"

He glanced caustically at Cella, then directed his outraged stare back toward Savorn. "The least you can expect is a morals charge."

The Chief Ursa turned to leave. But one of the security agents stopped him to whisper in his ear. Chimur started; stared even more incriminatingly at the couple, then stomped off.

SAVORN reluctantly took time off that night to trace the transmission cable, letting the hydrogen bag project run itself.

Starting with the general assumption that the line should emerge from the barrier and go underground somewhere close to the city, he began pushing into the Cliff at random places and feeling for the cable. He se-

lected this method rather than fight the constantly repelling force that he would face in attempting to trace the cable directly.

By dawn he had discovered the spot where the ground swallowed the line. But he drew back disappointedly. He had at least expected to find a shack or perhaps a cave that might conceal the transmitter.

There was nothing, however, but barren plain between him and the city, some two miles away. It would take weeks to uproot the cable and track it down. There was nothing to do but locate the transmission line at its origin.

At least he knew for certain now that there was a transmitter *somewhere*. And if, as he suspected, it was in Councilor Murdas' quarters, then he should be able to prove that the move to discredit the research bureau was but part of the overall sabotage strategy.

IT WAS late that afternoon, while Murdas would most likely be at his private office, that Savorn entered the building housing the government officials' dens. In the hall on Murdas' floor, he saw Chimur get out of another elevator and head for his suite. Hiding in a side corridor, Savorn waited until the other was out of sight.

Then he went cautiously to Murdas' den, stepping swift-

ly into the darkened reception grotto. Groping among the massive pieces of furniture, he made his way across the room and drew out the ring of keys Thiebok had obtained from the security ministry.

He tried several before he found one that opened the door to the inner compartments of the den.

A half-hour later he stepped back into the reception grotto, thoroughly disappointed. Nowhere in the locked rooms had there been anything even resembling a transmitter.

There was the sound of pawsteps in the corridor, so he decided to wait until the hall was empty before venturing out. But the pawfalls, thumping more anxiously now, drew closer.

Savorn concealed himself behind a chair next to the inner door.

The figure that darted into the grotto was silhouetted briefly against the background of corridor illumination. It wasn't difficult to recognize the large proportions of the bronze-colored Murdas as he stepped to one side of the room, his back to Savorn's hiding place.

But there was something wrong! Savorn choked back a cry of astonishment as he watched the other's body take on a subtle luminescence—not unlike the bolder luminosity of the Shimmering Cliff!

The aura cloaking the ursine outline grew brighter. Then, slowly, the figure changed shape, going through a steady, terrifying metamorphosis.

When the process was complete, it was no longer the glimmering form of a member of the ursine race that stood across the room! Rather, it was like the creature Savorn had seen the day before in the inner compartment of the soaring light!

Overpowering in the grotto now was the scent of something alien—something only once before encountered. The glittering aura subsided and the ghastly form took more substantial shape. It reached down with two pawlike appendages and manipulated dials on a metal box strapped to its waist.

Suddenly the aura flared brilliantly again as the creature turned back toward the wall. It went through its metamorphosis in reverse and lost its luminescence. Then it was all over and the familiar figure of the councilor strode to the entrance, was briefly outlined by the back lighting, and stepped briskly into the corridor.

Five minutes later Savorn ventured numbly from the grotto and headed for his own den, vaguely wondering what he should do about the creature masquerading as Murdas. For the moment, even the hydrogen bag project seemed insignificant in comparison

with his discovery of the outer-world being.

It was late that night when he finally decided that despite his disfavor with Chimur, he had to report what he had seen to the Chief Ursa.

BUT THE next morning, even as he prepared to visit Chimur, an armed courier came to his den and, without explanation, escorted him to the Chief Ursa's office.

Inside the heavily-carpeted room, Savorn stood humbly before the brown-hued official.

"I've got to talk with you, Chimur, about—"

The Chief Ursa banged the desk with a bludgeon-like paw. "It is I who will do the talking! And not about little white bears in tin eggs from another world! The council will meet in emergency session this morning. Do you know why?"

Savorn shook his head. "That can wait. What I have to—"

"Quiet! The council is meeting to consider an ultimatum from the Southern Nation. Either we halt our barrier research or they attack."

"But they can't dictate internal affairs!"

The other waved him silent. "Fortunately, we're spared the embarrassment of yielding, since we've already abandoned the project. I summoned you to show you the seriousness of going counter to public opinion."

Savorn should have been impressed with the ultimatum. But somehow it hardly seemed to matter now. "Last night I was in—"

"You see, Savorn," Chimur cut in, "even though I've been rough on you, I realize that basically, as a cub just starting out on a semi-public career—"

"There's an outer-world creature among us!" Savorn shouted finally.

The Chief Ursa's reaction was as though someone had fired a cannon under his snout. "What's that?"

"A being from beyond the Shimmering Cliff—Councilor Murdas! Hidden in his grotto last night, I watched him turn into a glittering monster, then into an other-world creature! I suspected Murdas was a subversive agent. But—"

An infuriated growl sounded and Savorn whirled around to see the trembling hulk of Murdas in the doorway, his vestigial fangs bared, the naked brown skin of his face flushed with rage.

But the councilor momentarily restrained himself, glancing respectfully at Chimur. "Sir?"

"I've no choice, Murdas, but to grant you the privilege of vindication under the ursine code of physical encounter, since you have been rashly accused."

Dismayed, Savorn edged away from the advancing Murdas. "This can't be set-

tled by the normal ursine code, Chimur!"

"Should you decide to challenge," Chimur told the councilor, "I would suggest that you do so on the basis of the more logical and damaging accusation of subversion."

Murdas spread his arms, limbered his great shoulders and advanced cautiously. "I challenge!"

Savorn faced the unursine thing uncertainly. But then a sudden determination seized him. What better way to tear away the councilor's disguise than through physical encounter?

MURDAS, suppressing a growl, lunged and swung his mighty paw in a blow that might well have taken off Savorn's head if he hadn't ducked.

Pivoting, he raked the councilor's midsection, shredding three layers of clothing. But the swiping nails encountered only down-covered flesh, failing to penetrate the disguise or contact the hidden metal box.

Murdas unleashed another vicious blow that caromed off Savorn's shoulder and clouted his head with a force that sent him reeling back.

Then the councilor charged, both paws swinging furiously. Trapped in a corner, Savorn took two of the savage blows on his face before he lowered his head and barged out.

The councilor swung

around, though, and seized him in a brutal hug. His chest crushed in the vise of thick-set arms, Savorn struggled desperately to send his paws raking through the creature's disguise.

Again, with failing strength though, his nails ripped the councilor's clothes, tore his skin. But still there was only the feel of solid flesh under his paw.

Murdas broke the hug and hurled him backward with a barrage of bludgeoning blows. Through dazed eyes, Savorn caught glimpses of a messenger entering the room, staring at the duel, speaking with Chimur.

Suddenly the Chief Ursa stepped in and seized the councilor's arms. "Hold, Murdas!" Then, "Do you retract on the first count, Savorn?"

Wavering, Savorn stared rapidly at Murdas. The councilor's clothes were tattered. His exposed flesh was laced with crimson creases. There had been no disguise. Murdas was, somehow, only Murdas—nothing more. "I retract."

The councilor, however, was not mollified. "I challenge on the second count!"

But Chimur shoved him back. "I suspend the code of direct challenge. There are matters on which Savorn must be questioned in the interest of security."

He fixed Savorn with a stern stare. "You will return to your den and await our summons."

SAVORN DIDN'T remain available for the summons. Instead he changed clothes and drove out to the shack, grateful for not finding Cella there and not having to answer her solicitous questions about his bruises.

The hydrogen bag was complete and was stretched across its inflation racks. The wire-net covering was being fitted on, together with the valve control device.

"How much longer?" he asked the yellow-hued supervisor.

"We'll start moving compressed cylinders into the pit tonight. Should be ready to blow her up sometime tomorrow."

Savorn cuffed the other. "Rush it up. I'm expecting a committee summons that could tie me up."

On the way back to town he struggled futilely with the incident of the previous night. Convinced that Murdas was actually Murdas, he wondered persistently how he had been misled.

Then he realized abruptly that it had been quite dark in the outer grotto and the disguised creature he saw might well have been the counterfeit image of someone else.

He forced the line of thought. If it was a case of mistaken identity, he at least knew now that the camouflaged creature would have to be masquerading as some high official who substantially resembled Murdas.

But there were scores of large, brown-hued officials living in that building—dozens on Murdas' floor alone.

Savorn reconstructed the incident; pictured the outworlder hurrying down the corridor, frantic because his disguise was failing, darting into the nearest reception grotto to make an adjustment on the metal box.

But who?

He dropped the enigma for the moment, turning instead to the incident of challenge-and-duel in Chimur's office.

The Chief Ursa had stopped the fight after receiving a message. Then he had said that he, Savorn, was to be questioned in the interest of security. What had come up? And, Savorn wondered, how was *he* implicated?

Shrugging hopelessly, he hurried back to his den. There was much he had to put in order before he soared over the barrier, perhaps never to return—notes to relatives, explanatory messages to officials.

LATE THAT night he was finishing the last letter when the summons from the investigative committee arrived. He would have ignored it except for the fact that the subpoena was delivered by an armed courier who was to escort him back.

In the committee room Savorn, with the courier standing beside him, confronted

Chimur and two other councilors.

The Chief Ursa leisurely thumbed through a file folder. Finally he closed the cover and motioned to the courier who opened a side door and let in a guard and a prisoner.

"Savorn," Chimur asked, "do you know this man?"

Savorn stiffened. "Thiebok!"

The Chief Ursa cleared his throat. "Since your association is so evidently established, we will proceed. How much restricted information have you passed on to this enemy agent?"

"Agent! That's impossible!"

"Denial will do you no good," said one of the other councilors. "Thiebok has already admitted his guilt."

"But I don't understand!" Savorn exclaimed helplessly.

"It's true," Thiebok said. "I'm an agent." He turned to the Chief Ursa. "But Savorn knew nothing about it."

Chimur waved him silent. "It's too late to avoid implicating your accomplice. You've already done that by the fact of your association and by the nature of the information you passed on along the wire we traced to you."

"The wire along the Cliff!" Savorn exclaimed. "The transmitter—in *his* den!" He remembered his fight with Murdas, realizing now that

the message Chimur had received at the time must have concerned the tracing of the cable.

"So," the Chief Ursa said, smiling, "you admit knowing about the cable. Still, I can't understand why you should plant your soaring light hoax so close to it. Surely you must have known that if we investigated we might find the cable too."

"But I didn't know about it until then either!" Savorn protested.

Chimur shook his head. "You're not very convincing. It would be better to admit that you and Thiebok used your positions for subversive purposes."

"That's not true!"

"Except to avoid implicating you, Thiebok has been quite cooperative," Chimur said, rising. "Perhaps if you two discuss it you'll realize things may go easier for both of you if we get frank cooperation all the way around."

Followed by the other councilors and the armed courier, he retired to an inner chamber. The guard remained at the other end of the room.

"Is it true?" Savorn asked incredulously.

Thiebok nodded.

"Cella?"

"No. She had nothing to do with it."

Savorn felt rage surging within him.

"I know I can't expect

you to trust me," Thiebok whispered suddenly. "But I'm not quite the same person who told you only a few days ago that nobody except you and me knew the Southern Nation had armored cars."

"You were aware that Murdas knew it too?"

"I told him. I knew he'd let it slip out. But he wouldn't tell you where he got the information since I gave it to him confidentially. I thought that was pretty smart—nursing your distrust so you'd suspect no one else."

SAVORN dropped dismally into a chair.

Thiebok stood humbly beside him, his voice a contrite whisper. "But I don't see things that way now. Your Cliff project, those philosophic talks—they convinced me that everything going on inside the barrier is insignificant. That's why I didn't tell them about the bag."

Savorn stared skeptically at him.

"That bag *has* to go over the Cliff!" the other continued. "Then everything else will be trivial—wars, unimportant. All nations will have to band together to face the outer world."

Still Savorn didn't answer him.

"That's why you're *going* to go soaring off over your barrier," the other enthused. "Get ready to run." Then,

aloud, "Here, take it! Quick!"

He thrust something into Savorn's paw and plopped a similar object into his own mouth. They were two small bits of paper, wadded to resemble pills.

The guard, shouting, lunged forward to grapple with Thiebok. Savorn recognized the strategy: The agent, convinced his prisoners were trying to kill themselves, would forget his weapon as he tried to prevent the suicides.

Reaching Thiebok, the sentry seized him in a headlock and tried to pry his jaws apart. At the same time the prisoner's paw went out unobtrusively to the guard's holster.

There was a single report and the agent collapsed.

"Get out! Hurry!" Thiebok motioned toward the corridor, then turned to face the charge of the armed courier from the inner chamber.

Savorn dived into the hall as the room reverberated with gunfire. He bounded down the three flights of stairs and lunged through the empty foyer. Then, fearing there might be guards outside, he left the building and started across the terrace.

"Savorn!"

It was Cella. She stood on the sidewalk beside her car. He halted and drew back suspiciously. If Thiebok hadn't lied about her not being implicated in subversion, how could Savorn accept the coin-

cidence that she was here with transportation just when he needed it?

She caught his arm and pushed him into the car. "I was beginning to think they would never release you."

"You know about Thiebok?"

She drove toward the Shimmering Cliff. "I was at the ministry when they came for him. I tried to find you."

"How did you know I was arrested?"

"I drove up in time to watch the courier lead you off."

Outside the city Savorn turned anxiously to see, whether they were being followed. But he felt reasonably safe, since barrier-ward would seem to be an illogical direction for him to take.

"Thiebok confessed," he said, watching Cella's reaction. "Then he tricked them so I could escape."

She stared puzzledly at him. "But why?"

"He said he believes in what I'm doing." He studied her expression for some indication whether she was part of Thiebok's plot.

"That sounds like Thiebok," she offered. "But it doesn't sound like an enemy agent. Are you going over the barrier after this?"

"If I get a chance to."

"What do you mean?"

He spread his paws uncertainly. When we start blowing up that thing it'll be visible for miles. They'll come fast."

BY DAWN, the burgeoning bag, fed by hissing hydrogen capsules, was already poking up above the tallest trees as Savorn impatiently shouted directions at the cylinder crews.

Cella came over. "It'll be two hours before it's filled. why don't you rest?"

He smiled wearily. "I won't argue. Call me in an hour—or before, if we get a warning from the lookout."

He trudged off toward the shack but started at the sound of an automobile backfiring in the forest.

Fearing an encircling force may have escaped the eyes of the outlook, he started off through the woods. Five minutes later he came upon tire tracks on the soft forest floor.

Trotting, he followed them toward the Shimmering Cliff.

When he reached the edge of the forest, he found the car parked next to the barrier. Then he drew up dumbfounded. Someone was standing in front of the Cliff, his body cloaked in brilliant coruscations! Meeting no resistance, the figure stepped into the barrier.

Was it the same one who had been in Murdas' outer grotto? Or, Savorn wondered, was there more than one disguised outer-world creature who could slip through the barrier at will and circulate among bear-kind?

Three shots sounded from the highway. He whirled around and sprinted back toward the shack on hearing the warning signal. As he reached the clearing, the outlook stumbled up the road from the highway.

"They're coming—three armored cars!" the guard shouted desperately. "They've seen the bag!"

Savorn turned desperately toward the hydrogen sack. It was but little more than half inflated. And there were only minutes left! Already, however, it was straining at its six mooring lines. Was there enough gas in the thing to carry him aloft?

He sprinted for the basket, half hidden in the limp lower folds of the bag. "Start cutting those ropes!"

In the gondola, he pushed the loose cloth to one side and gripped the safety rail as the crew hacked at the taut lines.

With five of the ropes severed, the great sack surged upward, tugging against its final anchor line. The winch lost traction momentarily and the bag lurched, jolting the basket.

The uninflated portion, no longer lying in pleats, now dangled inside the shroud lines like a flaccid tail, hanging curtain-like to the floor of the gondola.

Shots shattered the stillness of the forest a hundred feet below. Savorn leaned over and watched the crew cut the

final line. The bag lunged skyward along the face of the Cliff.

He turned to push the dangling cloth out of the way, but his arm contacted something firm behind the material and he brushed it aside.

"I don't know why I did it," Cella said meekly. "But I had to come along."

"You fool!" he shouted. Then, more gently, "You little fool!"

As she clung to him he wondered how he could have suspected she was working with Thiebok. Then suddenly he stiffened, his face awry with alarm.

"The valve release line!" he exclaimed. "It's caught up there somewhere! We can't get down!"

WITH TERRIFYING speed the bag shot skyward, skimming along the face of the great, gleaming Cliff. Savorn clung tenaciously to the safety rail while Cella held his arm in a desperate grip.

The wind howled through the shroud lines and buffeted the gondola like a cub playing with a ball of yarn. The basket swung, gently and pendulumlike at first, then more violently.

Below, miles below it seemed, tiny scurrying figures were like ants in the clearing. Shading his eyes against the glare of the barrier, he looked down on the outer-world creature's car,

still parked alongside the Cliff. It was hardly larger than a gnat now.

The bag brushed against the barrier and was repelled. The motion accentuated the swing of the gondola and Savorn closed his eyes against the frightening, sickening gyrations. The wind, gathering speed to whip up over the Cliff, roared contemptuously and shook the sack as though it were a giant's plaything.

Savorn suddenly felt the numbness of fear for the unknown. He pulled frantically on the dangling material, trying to shake the valve release rope loose.

But the shrieking wind finally caught the bag up in a mighty gust and sent it rushing over the top of the shimmering ridge—away from the green hills and lush forests of his familiar world.

Hesitantly, he stared northward into the outer world. And much of his fright disappeared. The land beyond the barrier was soft and undulating, rising here and there in tall hills and mottled in the same shades of green and tan that characterized the surface of the inner world.

He called encouragingly to Cella. But she was huddled on the floor of the basket.

Swiftly now the barrier fell away and behind as the bag rose at a steep angle. Savorn suddenly discerned outer-world activity a mile below, at the base of the Cliff opposite the spot where the car

was parked in the inner world.

A smoothly surfaced road ended abruptly at that point. And numerous unfamiliar vehicles jammed the end of the highway as their occupants, so remote now as to be nondescript, stood alongside and stared up.

MUFFLED thunder in the distant reaches of the outer world drew his attention and he turned to study a vast expanse of level ground, laid out in a square with squat buildings along one side.

The roaring sound crescendoed and three vivid splotches of light flared in the center of the rectangular area. They stretched skyward like columns of yellow-white fire. Finally detaching themselves from the surface and lunging straight up. Within seconds they disappeared in the remote regions of the sky.

Savorn's stare fell earthward from the soaring lights and found another object of wonder in the distance, beyond the rectangle. A city!

But it was—huge! And it was deserted, with its tall spires half covered by deposits of soil which sprouted profuse vegetation.

Impulsively, he stared back at the Shimmering Cliff, noticing that one of the unfamiliar vehicles was moving. It was climbing skyward—toward him!

Apprehensively, he backed across the gondola as he

watched the shining, disc-shaped thing close in and hover alongside the bag. Through ports in its under-surface, he could see the alien creatures—scores of them, their faces pale and hairless and their eyes staring out eagerly.

From a protuberance atop the disc, a shaft of vivid light stabbed out to encompass the basket. It was a blinding, painful beam that seemed almost as tangible as the material of the Shimmering Cliff.

But it did not repel. Rather, it attracted—swiftly, like a great magnet. The basket, trapped in the cone of brilliance, swung over toward the vessel, dragging along the hydrogen bag.

Then suddenly the intensity of the beam surged mercilessly and he shouted in anguish as he collapsed.

SAVORN OPENED his eyes and stared at the hospital room ceiling for several minutes before grim realization jarred him from his lethargy.

"The Cliff!" he shouted, hurling back the covers.

But the blue-hued paw of a nurse caught his shoulder and forced him back. "You've been under a sedative. You'll be all right."

"The barrier! I was—"

"On the other side." She smiled patiently, as though trying to help him remember. "The whole city watched you

go over in your floating bag".
"But—but how did I get back?"

"They found you by the Cliff last night."

He tensed, remembering Cella.

The nurse divined his question. "She's resting in the next room. They found her with you."

Savorn closed his eyes, trying to remember all.

But the nurse grasped his arm. "Beyond the Cliff—what's it like? What did you see?"

The door swung open to admit a uniformed guard and Savorn caught a glimpse of the corridor—jammed with a jostling, noisy throng.

Someone thrust a press camera in and a flash bulb's brilliance flooded the room before the guard could close the door behind him.

"You were to call me when he awoke," he reprimanded the nurse. Then, to Savorn, "You're being held in custody. The Chief Ursa is on his way over."

Savorn propped himself up in bed and stared out the window, Chimur farthest from his mind at present. Instead, he was wrestling with the enigmas—why he had been returned through the Cliff; the nature and purpose of the barrier; its connection with the patently superior beings on the other side.

A prairie dog darted into view on the lawn and Savorn watched the animal bristle

and whirl to meet an attack by another of its kind.

It dodged the snapping fangs and seized a broken branch that lay on the ground. Wielding the bough like a club, the defender held the other at bay.

Somehow the little creature seemed vitally important. But Savorn couldn't imagine why. Interested, he watched it parry and thrust and rout its adversary.

And abruptly, like a bit of puzzle fitting into place, a profound awareness of something vastly significant came over him. Somehow it all seemed interrelated—bear-kind, the Shimmering Cliff, the alien creatures of the outer world, ursine culture, the intriguing and ingenious prairie dogs—

The din in the corridor welled, intruding on his thoughts, and he turned to watch the Chief Ursa enter and dismiss the nurse.

"War's started, you know," Chimur said, standing beside the bed.

Savorn stared tentatively at him.

"It's your fault," the other continued. But there was no incrimination in his voice—only a shallow indifference. "When you went up in your bag that was the final provocation. It violated the Southern Nation's ultimatum. That's why Thiebok was so anxious for you to escape. He told us as much after the attack started this morning."

Savorn eyed him appraisingly. "You don't sound too concerned over the attack."

"Actually, I'm not," Chimur casually drew up a chair. "It's really of little consequence."

Savorn felt a sudden suspicion—a vague, nagging suggestion that the Chief Ursa was somehow part of the greater interrelationship of the barrier and all bearkind, the prairie dog and the outer world. "Why is war of little consequence?"

"Later." The other waved his paw desultorily. Then he turned to the guard. "Let them in."

The press barged in like a torrent. They hurled impatient questions while flash bulbs flared, blinding Savorn to the eager faces behind the cameras.

A semblance of order returned when someone suggested he recount his experiences during his flight over the barrier. Through it all the Chief Ursa leaned back, smiling complacently. Savorn, glancing misgivingly at him, got the impression that he was playing the role of an amused observer.

At the point in his account where he was describing the creatures he had seen in the vessel, one of the reporters waved a pencil at Chimur. "What are your reactions? Can you guarantee it isn't a hoax?"

The Chief Ursa studied the brown fuzz on the back of his

paw. "I'll stand behind this story," he said decisively. "It's no hoax."

Savorn frowned uncertainly, wondering how Chimur could back him so unquestioningly now, whereas before the Chief Ursa had skeptically rejected any mention of the outer world and its impossible creatures.

It was as though he had gone through a complete change of attitude. Now he seemed all indulgent and genial, kind and anxious to believe.

"But what does it mean?" someone asked. "If there's an outer world inhabited by intelligent creatures with soaring machines, why haven't they shown themselves?"

Savorn considered telling them about the being he had seen in Murdas' den. Indecisively he turned toward Chimur. But the Chief Ursa had gone to the window.

Then Savorn started as he noticed the other's general outline, standing out almost as a silhouette against the outdoor light. His reaction was one of fear and indeterminacy commingled with curiosity.

He shifted to see what Chimur was staring at on the lawn. It was the prairie dog, which was now using a piece of scrap metal to enlarge its burrow entrance.

"I think," Savorn told the reporter thoughtfully, "that their objective is to avoid us."

"Why?"

Savorn motioned through the window. "That animal on the lawn—"

Chimur turned suddenly and held up his paws. "That'll be all for now. There'll be another press conference tomorrow."

Savorn had expected just that sort of interruption. Give the public—all the nations—chance to absorb just so much before going on. It would be easier in small doses.

After the others had gone, the Chief Ursa dismissed the guard and stood smiling benignly down at Savorn. There seemed to be pride and approval in his eyes.

But Savorn only squirmed apprehensively. His suspicions weren't vague any longer. He thought of the incident in the officials' residence building—how any brown-hued individual of Murdas' general proportions could have darted into the councilor's outer grotto—how he had even seen Chimur in the corridor earlier.

He had no doubt now but what Chimur was the other-world creature in disguise.

THE CHIEF Ursa threw back his head and laughed.

"Why was I brought back?" Savorn asked finally.

"You'll be needed here. Bearkind is about to go through quite a revolution. Leaders will have to prepare them."

Evidently Chimur was

making no attempt to preserve the ruse he had carried on—for how long? Nor was he hesitating to show he was aware of the other's suspicion.

Savorn sat up in bed. "The Shimmering Cliff—what does it mean? How long has it been there?"

Chimur spread his paws. "Thousands of years. It represents perhaps the most prolonged sociological project ever attempted by humanity."

"Humanity?"

"That's a new word for you. It means human—like this."

Chimur's paw flicked in front of his waist and seemed to disappear into his clothes. There was a split-second flash of shimmering substance around his body and Savorn shut his eyes instinctively. Then the odor of the alien thing that he had smelled in Murdas' grotto was back—strong. Reluctantly he opened his eyes.

The outer-world creature was standing in Chimur's place—pale-skinned, dressed in tight-fitting garments, his paws fingering the box strapped around his waist.

Savorn drew back frightened at first. But then there seemed to be nothing threatening about the figure. Instead the same geniality that Chimur had shown during the past few minutes had transferred itself to this tall, lean shape.

The brilliant aura flared again and when it was gone there stood the familiar figure of the Chief Ursa once more.

"Afraid?" he asked.

Savorn only gaped.

"The Cliff, or the crude device that preceded it," Chimur resumed, "has been there ever since the first great genetic changes were observed among your predecessors—ever since mutational nakedness drove a few of your species away from hibernation and to the discovery of fire.

"We built simple barriers that were no more than fences at first. That was sufficient then, since it made no difference even if we circulated among you at that stage in your cultural development.

"But as your social groups evolved, creating the need for more complete isolation, so did human technology advance. Eventually we were able to generate the Shimmering Cliff as it exists today. But even that was before your earliest recorded history—before we had to disguise the observers and guides we placed among you."

Savorn mentally staggered before the concept of human intelligence—an intelligence that must have almost reached its fruition millennia before the first primitive bear discovered fire.

"But why?" he asked, perplexed.

"I think you know. I think you guessed it when you drew the press' attention to that prairie dog."

Savorn stared up pensively. "There's room for only one dominant species in a given environment. The race that evolves first stifles the development of all others."

The Chief Ursa nodded soberly. "We like to imagine the existence of a 'cultural corridor', with the various candidate species trying to advance along that corridor. But once any one group makes appreciable headway, the door is closed to all others."

He drew in a philosophic breath. "It isn't that the advanced race would purposely throttle the lesser one—resentfully kill them off. Rather, it's something that happens automatically. Finding themselves surrounded by such overwhelming superiority, the rejected candidates are culturally frustrated. They face a barrier much more insurmountable than the Shimmering Cliff."

Savorn was still wrestling with the concept of observers masquerading among bear-kind.

"You said you sent *guides* among us. Why?"

Chimur stared vacantly out the window. "When we decided to isolate bear-kind, we had just achieved flight between worlds." He smiled. "Not inner and outer world—

but the true worlds of planetary proportions. We realized then that there would some day be travel between worlds of different stars and that mankind might eventually quit the world of his origin. Wouldn't it be a pity if there were no species to whom we could bequeath the heritage we enjoyed here?"

Savorn sat up stiffly. "So you tried to qualify the heirs!"

"We isolated your species to give you the privacy in which to develop your culture. And we sent observers and guides to help you along. We were working against the day when the barrier could come down and you would inherit the earth.

"We guided your technical progress with disguised representatives in all your nations. Such supervision was necessary. There were times when your research took forbidden paths and had to be discouraged—such as wireless transmission, which would have allowed you to intercept our messages and become aware of us."

"And the hydrogen bag too," Savorn reminded. "You tried to kill that, didn't you?"

"Yes, we did. You see, it was established millennia ago that when you proved yourself capable of surmounting the Shimmering Cliff, that would automatically qualify you for your heritage."

"Then fighting the project,"

Savorn protested, "was unfair!"

"Not quite. We had assumed that by then you would have eliminated warfare as a social characteristic. So, even though you qualified on one score, you didn't on the other."

"Why didn't you show us how to stop wars?"

The other shrugged. "That's something that can't be shown, Savorn. It has to be learned for one's self if it's going to stick."

Savorn rose and paced, ending up at the window. He turned to face the Chief Ursa. "What's the verdict? Will the barrier come down despite our propensity for war?"

Smiling, Chimur nodded. "You see, we forgot that the *human race* didn't learn to control *its* propensity for war until after it had opened up an unlimited number of worlds through space travel. We realized finally that it was unfair to expect more of bearkind.

"Anyway, access to the outer world will take the pressure off your cramped nations. It should be a thousand years before the necessity for war arises again. By then you may have purged it out of your system."

Overwhelmed by the conceptual avalanche, Savorn stood staring mutely at the prairie dog that was still using the piece of scrap metal as a shovel.

Chimur came over and laid a paw on his shoulder. "Beyond the barrier, in the ruins left by the human race, you'll find much to advance your progress—but nothing to help you get off your new world. Such information has been carefully removed. That's something else you'll have to accomplish for yourself. By the time you achieve space travel I hope you are further along the cultural corridor than we were at that period."

Savorn eyed him quizzically. "The human race is ready to leave now?"

Chimur laughed. "It left a thousand years ago. Those still here are only the person-

nel of Project Barrier. When the Cliff comes down in a few days we'll be gone too."

Savorn looked down at his paws. "About the barrier..."

"Yes?"

Hesitantly, Savorn glanced out the window again. The prairie dog had finished enlarging its burrow entrance and was pushing several pieces of scrap metal down the hole. "Would the secret of the barrier be too much to ask for?"

"Why do you want that?"

Savorn gestured toward the animal. "That little fellow out there—he has his foot in the door of a cultural corridor too."

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brave feast

by L. KAZAR

The only time he'd relaxed was at the party celebrating New Year's Eve, 2,000. Even then he'd felt alone.

SINCE his life depended on the equipment of his profession, he made sure everything was adjusted correctly.

"You know the story in the bible where they won't let anybody into the wedding feast unless they wear a special garment," he said to Prescott, his manager and trainer, a worried man who had been with him from the beginning. "If I didn't wear this, you know, I couldn't go to *this* feast."

"What do you mean, feast?"

"They had a sport like this back in the twentieth century. Used to call it *La Fiesta Brava*. A feast is where everybody eats a big meal."

"You're always twisting yourself up with crazy ideas," said Prescott.

"It's thinking that keeps me alive," the fighter answered. He pulled the mask down over his face and looked at himself in the mirror. If he refused to put these things on, he would be free. He wouldn't have to go out there tonight.

He shook his head and went to the window, raising the mask from his face. He studied the palm trees along the shore, tall and skinny and

Some months ago we published a story about a matador who, competing with a matador of steel, looked at the people around them and knew them for what the Age had made of them. Now, in that same future, we meet another inheritor of the noble tradition—cynical and bird...

black in the moonlight. It's not putting on the equipment that commits you, he told himself, after all, you have signed the contract.

I have signed the contract for the last time, he answered himself.

"This is my hundredth fight, Prescott," he said. "The one I've been living for."

"Keep on living," Prescott advised.

"Oh, I will. I've got so many things to keep on living for. The things I never did. I've never drunk a glass of wine. I've never smoked a cigarette. I've never had a woman. But now I've got so much money I can afford to have the most expensive wine, cigarettes and women in the world. I'll be the first one that lived to retire and spend the money he made."

"You're one of the few guys in the world who can talk about retiring at twenty-five," said Prescott.

"I deserve it," said the fighter. "Nobody will say I don't deserve it. Seven years of this, Prescott. I'm the only one who ever lived to kill ninety-nine. After my seventy-third I was holding the world's record. I remember the night Belett was to kill his seventy-third, and it got him."

"He was never as good as you."

"I'm glad I'm stopping on the number one hundred and not the number seventy-three. Seventy three is such a meaningless number. I like round numbers."

"The only time I relaxed in the last seven years was that party you threw to celebrate New Year's Eve in 2000, speaking of round numbers. Everybody was happy that night. They made it through another thousand years. I won't live to see 2100."

Prescott said, "Sure you will. With all your money you can buy the best medical care in the world. Everybody expects to live past a hundred."

"Almost everybody."

"Life is good nowadays. It's easy to stay alive. You don't know what it was like when we had the wars. Things are improving all the time."

"Yeah," the fighter said. "The breeders are improving their product. They get bigger and faster and stronger all the time. The only thing that's not improving is me."

"They're all the same."

"It always seems to me as if I'm fighting the same one, Prescott. You can't tell them apart. It seems that I kill it one night, and then a few weeks later I have to go back in there and kill it again. Only each time it's a little harder to kill, and it tries a little harder to kill me."

"You get a lot more money each time, too," said Prescott.

"Money. To buy the best doctors in the world, you said a while ago. You know, all the money I have wouldn't be enough to get a doctor or anybody else to come in there and help me, if it got me and I needed help. I wouldn't be able to move fast enough to get away from it if it gets me once. It could kill me at leisure, and nothing would save me."

A chime rang, very softly. It used to be a loud gong, but Prescott had them change it. Prescott thought the gong was too startling, bad for the nerves. The fighter had never bothered to tell Prescott that the chime was just as bad, that anything at all was just as bad.

The moment when the chime rang, it was really too late for a man to turn back, and he had to begin to move forward.

As he walked to the door, the long knife swinging easily in his hand, Prescott gripped his arm, hard. "See you in a few minutes," Prescott said. It was Prescott's way of reminding the fighter that he was obligated to live through the fight and return.

As he walked up the ramp, the fighter could hear the tidal roar of the crowd through

the steel walls and the floor coming up from below.

What did they come to see? To see him win, he thought. To see a man kill something mindless and cold. Something that reminded them of the cold, mindless wars.

Now he was on the platform, up above everything, poised in the cold night air. A spacer from Keys Port whispered overhead.

Very slowly and carefully, the fighter concentrated on the thought that had got him through, that helped him relax and concentrate on killing.

I don't care if I live or die.

Then he pulled the oxygen mask over his face, rose up on the balls of his feet, encased in the rubber fins. He raised his hands, gripping the long knife, over his head, then leaned into the dive. The weight of the oxygen tanks on his back carried him head first into the pool.

Now, in the amber glare of the underwater floodlights he could see the crowd, tier upon tier of them, pressing their faces against the glass.

But he didn't have time to look at them. He looked down to the bottom of the pool, where a dark, tapering shape had been swimming slowly in the water and now had seen him.

The shark came at him.

of
pot
and
potter

by MACK REYNOLDS

The enemy warriors attacked, screaming their war cry as they advanced—weaponless—not daring to use their arms.

"ALAN, DEAR," Sally the matriarch told him, "going to visit the Turtles is out of the question now. The countryside is alive with warriors and armed sterilities and we're too busy in the fields to make it a clan expedition."

Alan said stubbornly, "You don't understand. I *must* see Warren."

Vivian, the scout chief, leaned against the wall of the clan assembly hall, eating an apple appreciatively. She was tall, shapely, a twenty-five year old goddess in her wolf clan kilts. "Isn't he cute?" she grinned. "Why do you have to see Warren, sweetie?"

"It's men's business. You wouldn't understand."

"It seems to me," Sally said impatiently, "every month that goes by there's more and more men's business that I can't understand. What kind of business?" She was a tall Junoesque woman of thirty five, firm and capable.

Alan used his high card. "You know very well there hasn't been a fertile man child born into the Wolves in all the years I've been here. It's been over thirty years since

Mack Reynolds, Editor, with Fredric Brown, of the SCIENCE FICTION CARNIVAL (Bantam) and well known in the Science Fiction field, has lived abroad these last years. Here he discusses an all too possible tomorrow where mankind is paying a heavy price for its atomic experiments.

one was born into the Turtles—me. The Burros have had only one in twenty years, and he was captured by raiders from Denver."

The two warriors stirred uncomfortably. "What's that got to do with you visiting the Turtles at just this time, dear?" Sally said.

"Warren has been investigating. He has some books."

"Oh, some books," Vivian grinned, throwing her apple core out a window. "That'll solve everything. Pretty soon every clan about will have half a dozen husbands instead of one."

"In the time of the ancients," Alan told her stiffly, "when these books were written, all men were fertile."

Sally said patiently, "According to myth-legend, dear, but..."

"According to history," Alan said in contradiction.

"Look here," Vivian said. "Why not let him go? Like this he'll just sulk about of no use to anybody. I'll take four of my girls, two with tommy guns, two with automatic rifles, all of us on horses. If we have any trouble we can either fight or run."

Sally said worriedly, "You think it would be all right?"

Vivian shrugged shapely shoulders. "Why not? If we get into trouble the girls and I will cover while sweetie, here, either ducks for the Turtle village, or our own, whatever is closest."

The four warriors were glad of the opportunity to get away from the fields. They caught six horses, saddled them up, armed at the arsenal and presented themselves to the matriarch and their scout chief, ready to be on the way.

Sally gave last orders. "Watch ammunition, Vivian, unless you're attacked, of course. But no hunting or targeting..."

Vivian, erect in her saddle, said impatiently, "I know as well as you do how short we are."

"All right," Sally said, and to Alan, "Have a good time, dear, but take care of yourself."

"Of course," he said.

On the trail in open country Vivian kept them bunched close together, riding easily at a canter. Through the mountain pass and in wooded areas she sent two of the warriors ahead and to each flank and left one to keep the rear. Young in years, she was old in war.

One of the scouts came riding back, not hurriedly.

"What is it, Jean?" Vivian called.

"Ahead of us. Three sterilies."

"Armed?"

"Two with muzzle loaders, one with bow and arrow," the scout said, her eyes sparkling. "Shall we give them a run? They're on foot."

Vivian raised a hand high and the other two scouts came

riding in. "Some sterilities ahead," Vivian told them. "Let's have some target practice."

"Sally said to conserve your ammunition," Alan protested.

Vivian scowled at him. "You stick to men's affairs, sweetie."

He said stubbornly, "You heard her. First of all she said not to waste ammunition unless you got into a fight, and secondly she said to avoid one since I might get hurt."

"You men," Jean growled. Then to Vivian, "We can leave Alan here. Sally said it was all right to do some firing if we got into a fight."

"If you leave me here, something might happen to me," Alan insisted. "And, besides, there wouldn't be a fight unless you provoke it. Those sterilities aren't going to attack us. They're poorly armed and there are only three of them."

Vivian said, "And for all we know next week they may be sneaking around the village trying to steal food or even guns and ammunition."

"We haven't been bothered by thieves for months."

"Oh, very well," Vivian sneered. "A little blood makes you sick to your stomach doesn't it, cutie?"

He didn't answer her.

Five minutes later they passed the sterilities who stood by the side of the path, ragged, scrawny men who looked insufficiently fed, and were.

They made no attempt to hold their weapons at the ready. Any of the five women could have wiped them out with a burst of automatic fire and they were aware of it.

As they came opposite Alan called out, "How goes the hunting?"

"Bad," the foremost of the sterilities grunted. "Ain't hardly no animals left."

"That's because you sterilities have killed them all," one of the warriors said bitterly.

"We've got to eat," the sterility told her, his voice empty.

"Why?" Vivian said under her breath.

Abruptly, Alan halted, threw open one of his saddle bags. "Here," he said. "Here's some bread and meat." Before his women could stop him he had distributed his lunch to the three half starved desert men.

"What'd you thinking you're doing?" Vivian snapped. "Take that food back!"

He was defiant. "No. They're hungrier than I am."

"There're lots of people, especially sterilities, hungrier than you. We're not so well off we can feed every desert rat we come across."

The three sterilities squinted up at him, taken aback. "Thanks," the spokesman said. They disappeared into the sagebrush before the warrior girls could dispossess them.

Vivian glared at him in disgust. "There's a man for you.

Our clan gives you the best food we produce. And what do you do? You give it away to desert scum the first chance you get. Now what'll happen when lunch time comes? You won't have a bite."

"I don't care."

"Alan can have my lunch," one of the warriors said quickly.

"Or mine," another blurted.

"Shut up, you two. What are you trying to do undermine my authority?"

THE AMBUSH was a failure, desperate and foolhardy.

The ten or twelve enemy warriors must have hidden themselves in the draw to the right of the march—so well that Jean, the right flank scout Vivian had put out, missed them entirely. She was a full two hundred yards ahead when they charged over the draw's top and, screaming their clan war cry, dashed at full speed for Alan, Vivian and the one warrior not on scout duty.

It was doomed to failure since they couldn't afford to use their arms. It was a calculated risk, charging into Vivian's fire and that of her companion but it was a fire they couldn't return—not without chancing to hit the man, and that was out of the question.

Before they were half the distance to the small group, Vivian had her tommy gun

unslung from her shoulder, had chopped out two, three short bursts, toppling warriors from their saddles like ten pins going down.

"Get out of here!" she screamed at Alan. "Ride for the Turtle village! We'll hold them."

Alan dug his heels into the horse's sides, bent low and dashed forward, heart in mouth. A shouting woman loomed before him, grabbed for his bridle. One of his Wolf clan guards, the girl who had missed spotting the ambush, came riding up, her horse's mouth already lathering. She shoved the muzzle of her automatic rifle into the enemy's abdomen, flicked the trigger, *blat, blat, blat*.

The hand dropped away from his bridle and Alan felt his stomach turn with the need to retch.

He could hear Vivian's voice crying from the rear. "Jean! Ride with Alan. We'll cover. Get him out of here."

"Hurry!" Jean called to him shrilly. "I'm right behind you. Go!"

The horses scrambled, slipping, sliding on the gravel path, their eyes wide with terror at the noise and unsure footing.

Behind him, Jean's automatic rifle stuttered, stuttered again, fell silent. Without turning he knew her motions behind him. She slapped the side of her gun, letting the empty magazine fall to

the ground as she jammed a full one into place. *Blat, blat, blat.*

"Faster!" she yelled from behind.

"Where're Vivian and the others?" he couldn't help calling back.

"What difference does it make? We've got to get you out of here. Hurry, there may be more of them."

Her gun went *blat, blat* just once more and then was silent again.

They went for half a mile before he turned to look back. They were clear. Behind him, Jean reeled in her saddle, her face a colorless mask. He drew up, halting his side-heaving horse. One side of the warrior's kilt was moist, blood streamed down her leg to color red her leather sandal.

She shook her head to clear it. "Keep going. I'm all right. You ride ahead, get to the Turtle..."

He said, "No. The horses are already feeling it. We'd do better going more slowly. And, besides, you're hit."

"I'm all right. But I'm going to stop here, at this little pass. I'll wait to see if any more of them are following. I can hold them here. You go on, honey."

"No," he said. "You need help. Where are you hit, Jean?"

"You go on," she said anxiously. "If they've finished Vivian and the others I can hold them here until you're

safe." She shook her head again, trying to achieve clarity. "Look, honey, it doesn't make any difference how many of we women are lost—as long as there are any of us left at all. But you're our husband, if you die or are captured, the clan dies. I'll wait behind this rock. It'll take them half an hour to root me out of here."

He said, "No," stubbornly. "We've already left them. I can't hear anyone coming. We'll go on together."

She fainted then, dropping her gun into the dust, slumping forward over the pommel of her saddle.

He got down, slung the gun over his own shoulders, climbed back onto his horse, did his best to steady her as they rode on. The Turtle village wasn't far now.

It had been Crows who had jumped them. A clan without a husband. He had heard vaguely that they'd had a husband up until a couple of months ago but that he had died while still in his twenties. Some sort of illness. This was the third attack the Crows had made on other clans, all of them unsuccessful, there must be few of them left. Only a few weeks ago, in company with the Horses, another husbandless clan, they'd made an all out attack on the Wolf village.

And this was the fourth attack the Wolves had repulsed in six months. He knew his

clan couldn't take much more. Jean, here, was hit badly. Whether or not Vivian or any of the other three girls had survived, he didn't know. By the sounds of the action, it seemed unlikely; they'd been outnumbered three or four to one.

The Turtle clan's village was less than a mile beyond. He knew it well, of course. A Turtle by birth, Alan was, by clan system, a relative of all Turtles. His father had been traded to the Turtles at the age of sixteen, since then, after twenty years with them, he had been traded again to a clan to the north. Interbreeding had to be controlled, no husband remained with a clan for more than twenty years.

They were met on the outskirts of the village by half a dozen armed Turtle warriors. Blood kin of his, they greeted him gruffly, slipped Jean from the saddle and hurried off with her.

Pauline, the matriarch, said, "What happened, Alan?"

"I came over to see Warren." He slid from the saddle and made the obeisance due her as his clan matriarch. "We were jumped by Crows about three miles back, Jean and I rode on ahead."

"Of course," the matriarch said flatly, "you couldn't be risked." She turned and shouted, calling up a rescue party, sending them off to the fight, if fight here still was.

She turned back to Alan.

"We've got to stick together, the Turtles and Wolves. These husbandless clans will attack Wolves one day, us the next."

"Where've they taken Jean?" Alan asked.

"To Warren."

"Warren? Why?"

Pauline scowled at him. She was a woman approaching fifty and the twenty years she had held her position as clan matriarch weighed heavily on her. "It's been quite a while since you were here. Warren has... Well I'll let him tell you about it."

She led him through the village street to the house of Warren, husband of the Turtle clan, pushed the door open and entered the one large room.

The warriors who had carried Jean in were standing back against the wall, wide eyed. The wounded Wolf was stretched out on the heavy wooden table and Warren bent over her. In his hands was a strange emblem, new to Alan. As he motioned with it over the prostrate girl, he mumbled words Alan failed to understand. He then reached into a tin and sprinkled a dust-like powder over the wound in her side.

"May the Great One grant you continued life," Warren intoned.

"Yes, Great One," two of the Turtle warriors muttered after him.

Warren looked at Alan, his

eyes alive and expressive.

Alan said, "Yes, Great One." He noted now, for the first time, that two of the four Turtle warriors had emblems about their necks, emblems of the type with which Warren had gesticulated over Jean.

He was mystified. He knew that with a wound like that, Jean was almost certain to develop gangrene, as the books called it. Develop gangrene and die. What was this mumbo-jumbo Warren was going through?"

"And now," Warren said, "take her away and let her be watched after by two faithful followers of the Great One, none others may approach her."

Pauline, the matriarch, said, an element of defiance in her voice. "I need all my warriors. The Crows are in the vicinity, raiding. I can't spare anyone to watch over her."

Warren said with cool dignity. "Young people, or elderly ones, will do. Nothing matters but that they be followers of the Great One."

Warren turned to Alan then and placed a hand on his shoulder. "Love and fertility, brother," he intoned, and again the spark of secret communication was in his eye.

"Love and fertility, brother," Alan repeated, hoping he was responding correctly to the cue.

Pauline shrugged her heavy shoulders and was gone. Her

warriors followed, carrying Jean. The two who wore the emblems made a quick obeisance to Warren as they left.

When they were alone, Alan turned to his friend and said, "What goes on here? What was all that mumbling over Jean? That girl's done for."

Warren grinned at him, even as he shook his head. "No," he said, "five chances out of six she'll survive."

"I don't know much about medicine," Alan argued, "but gangrene is going to set in that wound or I miss my guess."

"You miss it all right," Warren told him. "Sit down, Alan, while I bring you up to date on developments."

Alan found a seat, glad for the opportunity to relax after the excitement and exertions of the past couple of hours.

Warren located some of the strong trade tobacco that filtered in from the East, offered his guest a clay pipe, and loaded up himself. He was a man of possibly fifty, a little inclined to a paunch about the waist, but noted for his good humor and his phobia for books.

He said now, "In your reading did you ever pick up any information on the sulphas and some of the other so-called miracle drugs?"

"Ummm. That's the difficulty trying to profit by the books. Vaccines, miracle drugs, surgical wonders, are

fine but what good does it do us? We have none of the materials necessary to make even aspirin, whatever that was."

Warren wagged a finger at him. "This happened possibly two months ago. Harold, husband of the Burro clan, discovered a cache that must have been laid down for military purposes back before bomb day."

"A cache?" Alan echoed. What had this to do with Jean and her gangrene?

"A cache of military supplies, a quantity of them sealed in airtight tins. Evidently they'd been meant to be dropped from aircraft. You follow me?"

Alan flushed. "I'm not completely stupid. The ancients had aircraft for both civil and military use. They were able to drop supplies by, ah, parachutes..."

"Parachutes," Warren corrected.

"...to isolated military commands, that sort of thing."

"That's right. Well, these supplies were largely medical including great quantities of the sulphur drugs. Other things too, most of which he's still in the process of trying to figure out."

Alan whistled softly between his teeth. "And that was what you sprinkled on Jean's wound. But, listen, what was that thing you waved over her?"

Warren grinned again. "The emblem of the Great One!"

"What are you talking about?"

Warren put his head back and laughed aloud, but then his face went suddenly serious. He said, "Alan, at last we've got the lever we need. For years you and Harold and I, and some others for that matter, have seen the need to unite the clans both to form a solid front against the forager-hunters and to work together in selective breeding in an attempt to bring fertility back to men."

Alan nodded. "But power is in the hands of the women and they'll stick to what we have today as long as they can. Each clan is conservative and peaceful as long as it has a husband. When they lose him, that clan in turn goes berserk until it's either wiped out or captures some other clan's fertile male."

Warren nodded. "And occasionally in the battles that ensue, the male in question is killed himself. That happened in the ruins of Pueblo the other day."

"Oh no. And so few left."

"But to get back to the lever," Warren said. "Alan, in the past month and a half I've cured a dozen wounds and illnesses that could have been fatal."

"What's that got to do with amalgamation of the tribes?"

"I did it in the name of the Great One." The older man leaned forward. "Already, nearly half the Turtle clan are

members of the new religion."

Alan looked at him blankly.

"Don't be thick! Alan, you've just become an apostle of this Great One, Father of All, Lord of Fertility, whose message is supposedly coming out of the east. Harold and I are the other apostles. When we have the strength, all we have to do is proclaim that the Great One demands the joining of the clans into a tribe, or nation, call it what you will."

Alan nodded in agreement to that. "Sooner or later, we've got to join. There are at least a thousand armed women in the Denver area alone that haven't a man between them. Given union on their part they'd sweep over the agricultural communities like a flood."

"Even more than that," Warren said glumly. "Eventually, Alan, we've going to have to attack Denver. No, I'm not crazy. In Denver are the ruins of libraries. In these parts we get a book here, a book there, with long intervals between. It's got to the point that only the husbands read to any extent anymore and we're limited by material. Fertility is falling off, Alan, and has to be restored. We know there have been works on breeding, on genes and chromosomes, whatever they are, on such things as artificial insemination. All that information is in the books in Denver. We need them."

Alan whistled softly. "But even with a joining of the local clans we'd have a few hundred persons at best."

There was a banging at the door and Vivian, her clothing torn, an arm in a makeshift sling, strode in grinning. "Hi, sweetie," she said to Alan, "Hello, Warren. What are you two darlings up to in here?"

Alan was on his feet. "Vivian! Then you're safe. What about the others?"

Her face clouded. "Frances and I got away, in the confusion of you and Jean riding off. But Rose and Beth..." she shrugged. "At least you're safe."

"Jean..." Alan began.

"I know. Don't worry your handsome head about it. Jean might last for a week, but nine chances out of ten are against her."

Warren said, his voice unctuous, "Jean will live, she is in the care of the Great One."

Vivian looked at him. "What's the matter with you, Warren dear? And what's that silly looking thing hanging around your neck? I noticed half the Turtles in town are wearing them."

Alan said hastily, "I will explain to you later, Vivian." He added, "a wonderful thing has come to this part of the world."

"Oh, fine," Vivian grinned at him. "Well, I'll leave you to your men's business, can't imagine how you spend your time. I'm going to look in on

Jean again. The poor girl knows she's sunk."

When she was gone, Warren said, "Well, there you are. I'll give you an emblem I've had waiting for you and some of the sulphur powder. There're a few other drugs we've figured out the use for. Morphine for instance. A day or two of instruction and you'll have as much information as Harold and I have. Further study might bring some more uses to light, but even this much is pure miracle."

WHEN ALAN rode back into the village of the Wolves he had his new emblem about his neck and his head was filled with terminology of the religion founded by Harold of the Burros and Warren of the Turtles. When Sally, the matriarch, and several of her warriors welcomed them he said, copying the unctuous tone of his friend, "Love and fertility," and held up his emblem.

"What's this?" Sally said. Her eyes went from Alan to Vivian, then to Jean, still pale of face from loss of blood and heavily bandaged about her side. Two of the warriors helped her down from the saddle.

Vivian explained briefly. "We were jumped by Crows. They got Rose and Beth and Jean was nicked—bad." A puzzled expression came over the scout chief's face. "We

got through to the Turtle village and Warren... Well, he has some new... what would you call it, Alan?"

"Warren had heard the call of the Great One through whom comes all love and fertility." He brought his emblem to his lips and kissed it.

Sally blinked at him, turned her eyes back to Vivian.

Vivian laughed, but it didn't quite come off. "Jean took a slug through her side but Warren cured her."

"The Great One cured her," Alan protested mildly. "Warren is but an apostle."

Sally grunted her inability to understand all this. "Well, all I wish is that we had an apostle around here, then." She turned to the warriors. "Get Jean into bed, she still looks weak."

Vivian said, "It so happens we do have."

"Have what?" Sally said. "Only about half of what you two say makes sense. Are you all right, honey?" she asked Alan worriedly. "You weren't bothered in that fight, were you?"

"I have found love," Alan told her.

"What's the matter with him?" Sally asked Vivian.

Vivian said, "We've been getting it all the way back from the Turtle village. In fact, we got it there too. It's this religion, or whatever you want to call it. Warren got it from Harold. He's supposed to have got it from somewhere.

further back east, but he's an awful liar. I think he probably made it up himself. These men don't know what to do with all the time they have on their hands."

"Sister!" Alan said reproachfully. "May the Great One forgive you."

"Look here," Sally snapped, "do you mean to tell me, honey, that you think you can cure wounds too—the way Warren did Jean?"

"I can but invoke the assistance of the Great One," Alan said. What was she leading up to? His knees felt shaky. He had no knowledge of medicine beyond the reading of a few books—and beyond the packet of sulphur drugs and the various pills Warren had given him.

"Dave laid his leg open with an ax yesterday," Sally said grimly. "Of course, he's only a sterilie but he was one of our best field hands."

Dave. Alan felt a pang. Of all the sterilie men belonging to the clan, Dave was one of the few who read and studied to the point where he was an interesting conversationalist. If only he'd been born fertile.

"It is for the Great One to decide," Alan said. "But this follower will be glad to see Brother Dave."

Dave was stretched out on a sterilie dormitory bunk, hot with fever and tossing with pain. Allan wished that he had been able to get to him sooner. The big man had a

constitution like a wild horse, but the leg was cut half through.

He was going to have to combat that pain first. Alan made ritualistic motions, hoping that they were as impressive as Warren's act, and then, as an increasing group of Wolf warriors gathered at a short distance to watch, plunged a morphine surette surreptitiously into the injured man's arm.

He stood back then and raised his emblem above the other, closed his eyes and muttered gibberish for long moments.

Sally said from behind him and in impatience, "Honey, what in the world are you doing?"

Alan said, in unwonted severity, "Do not interrupt. I am invoking the Great One to cease Dave's pain so that I may aid him."

And with that relief came over Dave's face, he sighed deeply and then fell off into sleep.

As though nothing could be more normal, and ignoring the reaction behind him, Alan bent over and inspected the wound. It seemed impossibly bad to him. He wondered why the women hadn't already applied their primitive surgery, amputated the leg and then cauterized the stump with an iron.

Now he called for hot water, washed the wound as clean as he could, again peti-

tioned the Great One, sprinkled the wound thoroughly with the sulpha powder, and then sewed it up as best he could with needle and gut.

He turned to the Wolf warriors behind him and stuck his neck out far beyond the confidence he felt.

"The Great One has heard our prayers," he told them. "Dave will live. Dave will walk. Love and fertility."

"Now ain't he cute?" Vivian shook her head tolerantly. "Who'd ever known our Alan would put on a show like this?"

But the others said nothing as Alan left.

DAVE BECAME his first real convert, but not on the basis that Alan had expected.

On the third day, recovering, he lay on his bunk and looked up at his friend. He said, "Alan, what saved my leg?"

Alan was honor bound to keep the secret. He began adopting the voice of the apostle which was beginning to come easier to him now. "The Great One..."

Dave chuckled appreciatively, but shook his head. "No. It won't do. I don't know what you and Warren have in mind, but it won't do for me." He patted his leg, to indicate thanks. "I'm willing to help out if I can, because I believe in you both, but you'll have to tell me what's

going on. What happened to my leg?"

Alan gave up. "Sulpha powder," he said. "First I killed your pain with morphine, then I dosed you with sulpha. You'll probably have a limp for the rest of your life, though."

Dave's eyes widened. "Sulpha? I've read about it. But, Alan, that's little more than myth-legend. Sulpha!"

Alan decided to take him in completely. He explained Warren's plan, the overall scheme involving a unification of the clans strong enough to give mutual protection and to carry on breeding fertility experiments.

Dave had been nodding as his friend talked. "Religion," he said. "There was a trend away from it during the bitterness that followed bomb day." He thought for long moments then said, "And what place is there in his new society for the sterile?"

"I don't know," Alan said frankly. "What do you think?"

Dave was suddenly pouring it out. "I've been thinking about it for years. Alan, this nation of yours can't be accomplished without the sterilities. Listen to me. After the big bombs, one of the first things done by the women, and the fertile men, was to drive the sterile men from the clan. There wasn't enough food for all and sterilities were expendable...they thought.

Some clans killed them, some drove them off. Possibly it made sense when food supplies depended on finding canned goods and on hunting; the smaller the clan, the better. However, when the canned goods became increasingly rare and animals, most of them as sterile as men, reached the vanishing point, man turned back to agriculture.

"Now the situation is different. The more sensible clans have stopped driving their sterilities away, they're accepting him as junior members of the community. The reason is good. In farming, a man can produce more than he himself eats. His sexual fertility has nothing to do with it. He's an asset."

Dave thumped his forefinger against Alan's chest for emphasis. "You're going to need numbers in this new nation of yours and one of the few places you can find recruits is among the sterilities."

"You mean..." Alan said, taken aback by the magnitude of the suggestion.

"I mean from the desert sterilities. There are hundreds of them out in the mountains and the wastes trying to make livings by themselves. There's not a thing wrong with any of them short of fertility. Actually—possibly this is heresy, but make what you will of it—there's no reason why a sterile can't be as good a worker, hunter, or even, don't

be shocked, warrior as a woman."

"I'm not exactly shocked," Alan said slowly, "I...I just hadn't ever thought of it before."

"I suggest that you and Warren and Harold work into this religion of yours that *all* mankind are brothers. Which reminds me, I've got some other ideas you might use. One book in particular, from back before bomb day."

Alan said, "I didn't know you had any books I haven't seen, Dave."

"I'll show them to you as soon as I'm up and out of here."

"We'd better start going over this now," Alan said. "When you're in shape to walk again, you'll want to start off rounding up these sterilities of yours, spreading the word of the Great One and his plan of unification."

Dave took a deep breath, looked him in the eye. "Do you think you can sell Warren and Harold on the idea?"

"I think so."

"And that I—a sterile—am going to be trusted to help you put it over?"

"I think so, Dave."

Their hands met in a clasp that, unknown to either, had gone out of style generations before. A clasp of solidarity and friendship.

BY THE time Warren and Harold were ready for the amalgamation + + + had

planned, Alan had converted no more than four or five of the Wolf clan's warriors, however, all of the clan's sterilities were his—they had nothing to lose—and all the children under the age of thirteen, both male and female.

The latter had been quite easy, he being clan teacher. He was worried about the warriors, though. He could have used more time. Aside from Dave, now gone off into the desert, he'd had no opportunity to perform the medical miracles that would have made conversion easier. He had another disadvantage too—his youth. Warren and Harold had the dignity of age, but in the Wolf clan the warriors were more apt to view him fondly but less than seriously.

It had been an ordeal to get the Wolves to attend the conference at all. For one thing, it was a secret as yet that Warren and Harold were to propose unity. The meeting was presented as a combination of trade, harvest celebration, and general get-together for the fun of it. The three clans involved, Wolves, Turtles and Burros, had been friendly for more than a decade and loosely united when it came to repelling the depredations of the hunter-foragers.

Upon arrival of the Wolves at the camping ground which had been chosen for the inter-

clan meet, the three apostles held conference. They met in the tent set up for Harold by the warriors of the Burro clan and the older men rapidly sketched out for him the progress their movement had made.

Harold said, "I've been working on Fredric..."

"The Fox clan down near the Pueblo ruins?"

Harold nodded, "...and it's possible they might come in with us."

Warren said excitedly, "They're the ones who have been working iron. They've given up agriculture and have been making gunpowder and muzzle loaders and trading them to the other clans."

"And knives and plows and a dozen other products," Harold said. "I needn't point out the advantages of having them in the nation."

Alan told them about Dave and the attempt to bring the desert sterilities in, and the older men looked doubtful.

"I don't know," Harold said. "There's a lot of prejudice against sterilities. It's only in the last couple of decades that the women have allowed even their own sterilities to remain within the clan."

"We need numbers," Alan said, repeating Dave's arguments. "A sterile can be as valuable as a woman to a nation."

Warren said uncomfortably, "Well, perhaps, but I doubt if your friend Dave

will have much luck at any rate. The desert and mountain sterilities are wild as animals."

Harold said, "Let's get back to progress within our own clans. Alan, how have you done?"

He hadn't accomplished much, compared to them. Warren had converted more than half of his clan and Harold had done nearly as well.

It was decided that Warren would be named Chief Apostle and be spokesman and that they would wear white robes and carry staffs when enacting their roles as religious leaders.

Alan said hesitantly, "Not to bring up the sterility question again, but this Dave is a well read man."

"And..." Warren frowned.

"Well, he had some books I'd never seen before. Had some ideas in them I thought we might work in." Alan held forth a paper hesitantly. "I've copied some of the, well, teachings I guess you'd call them, down here. You might look them over." He added, apologetically, "Some of them look pretty good to me. Shouldn't a religion be sort of idealistic?"

Harold took the paper and read some of the sentences, handed it over to Warren who scowled down at them, not particularly interested. "Might be able to work some of them into my speech tomorrow," he grunted.

"What speech?" Alan wanted to know.

"We're going to take the big chance tomorrow at an assembly of the three clans. I'm going to call for union, a common village, a tribal council with power to make research into planned breeding as well as to supervise food production and defense."

"It should be possible," Alan said hopefully.

Warren's good humor flashed through the seriousness of the situation momentarily. "Where we're going to get our opposition is when I propose that the council be composed equally of representatives from the clans and of the Great One."

"Representatives of the Great One?" Alan said blankly.

Warren grinned. "That's us, brother apostles. We've got to be on that council and, in fact, we've got to control it, otherwise all the things we want to do will never be pushed."

THE NEXT day they planned their campaign as well as possible, arranging their strongest adherents in strategic positions unbeknowns to their clan matriarchs and scout chiefs.

The meeting opened with short, unprepared addresses by Sally, matriarch of the Wolves, by Pauline, of the Turtles, and by Ruth, of the Burros. All of them stressed

the importance of cooperating between themselves, all of them reported on the depredations of the forager-hunters, most of whom were husbandless clans. None offered a solution to what was obviously rapidly becoming a life and death struggle for the agricultural clans.

Following Pauline's address she hesitated. She alone of the matriarchs, Alan noted, wore the emblem of the Great One. That, at least, was a good sign.

She said, "It isn't usual for a husband to address a meeting of this sort, and I'm sure you warriors will not think it a lack of modesty on the part of our clan if I ask your permission to have Warren say a few words."

There were murmurs from warrior ranks, but Warren stepped forward before it came too prevalent.

In his hands he bore an emblem several times the size of any Alan had thus far seen. Ritualistically he gestured with it in the direction of Harold's Burros. "Love and fertility," he called softly.

The children and sterilities of the Burro clan were only seconds behind Harold when he sank to his knees intoning, "Love and fertility," in response.

The dozen or so warriors of the clan who wore the emblem about their necks, looked to right and left in agonized embarrassment. One of them,

who bore a long ugly scar along her arm, tightened her face defiantly, sank down and intoned, "Love and fertility." The others followed her, leaving of the entire Burro clan only a score or so of standing women.

Warren turned to his own clan, the Turtles, called again, "Love and fertility." As before, the children and sterilities dropped to their knees, but only a fraction of the warriors. Alan noted dumbly that although Pauline, the matriarch, wore the emblem, she remained erect. This was bad.

Beside him, at the fore of the Wolves, Vivian chuckled aloud. "What's all this?" she said aloud. "More men's nonsense!"

Warren turned to the Wolves, gestured with his emblem and Alan sank to his knees in answer. From the sides of his eyes he counted those who followed him. Only a handful, other than children and sterilities, and children and sterilities counted not at all in clan councils.

They were failing to put it over. This was all premature. He gritted his teeth in self reproach.

Warren spoke to them now. "From the east," he intoned, "have come words of good cheer to we who have seen our numbers dwindle away. Who have seen the unbelieving barbarians of the north sweep over our lands, killing

our warriors and attempting to steal the husbands of our clans."

Those kneeling, remained. The warriors still standing shifted from one foot to the other, looked embarrassed or worse, bored.

Warren said, "The words of cheer are from the Great One, Lord of Fertility, Father of All who promises fertility and protection from their enemies to those who unite in his name. Everywhere in the east the clans are joining, forming nations, forming councils, planning together in the name of the Great One, spreading the message of Love and Fertility."

Vivian said aloud, "How long does this nonsense go on? Let's get to the games and the feasting."

Alan breathed, "Gently, Vivian. Hear the words of the Great One."

"Great One my neck," Vivian said, laughing. "This is all very fine for you, cutie. But for me, I came here to do some eating, a lot of drinking—and, come to think of it, I might look you up tonight."

There was a general laugh which spread through the warriors of all three clans and several of them began to drift away from the meeting, talking among themselves. Those warriors on their knees looked hesitant.

It was then that the first sounds of the approaching

group came in from above the hill, a low strange overflood-ing sound none could quite make out. None present had ever heard a hymn before.

A scout, rifle in hand, came at full tilt down the slope.

"Sterilies!" she yelled at Pauline, her matriarch. "Must be a hundred of them."

Warriors scurried in all directions for arms.

Sally called, "Are they armed well? A hundred! They outnumber us!"

Vivian laughed aloud joyfully. "What difference does it make? They're only sterilies. Any woman is worth a dozen. Where's my gun?"

The scout had come to a halt now in the confusion before the speaker's stand. She said, "That's it. They aren't armed at all."

The confusion broke. Everyone stopped and looked toward her.

"Not armed?" Sally said blankly. "Then why are they attacking?"

The sound from above the hill, closer now, became more distinct. It was a chant, not a song. A Song such as none of them had heard before. Strange, but, in a way, compelling.

The first of the approaching sterilies topped the rise and started down toward them, a large emblem held aloft.

Alan could make out snatches of the words of the song "*...love conquers all...*"

He caught Warren's eye, made words with his mouth, silent words. "It's Dave."

Warren took the ball tossed him, holding his emblem out toward the arriving sterilities.

Vivian was up on the stand beside him, legs spread firmly, submachine gun at the ready. "What do you desert rats want?" she snapped.

Warren said softly, "Why do you come here, Brother?"

Dave turned and faced the hundred or more lean and wiry men who followed him and they sank to their knees, holding their emblems in their hands.

Dave said, "Members of the clans, in the desert we have heard voices telling us that the followers of the Great One have gathered here to form a new tribe to prevail against the unbelievers and to unite so there will be greater fertility among all. We have come in our humbleness to swear allegiance to the Great One and to the new nation. Accept us, O Apostle of the Great One, as He has commanded, Do Unto Others As You Would They Do Unto You."

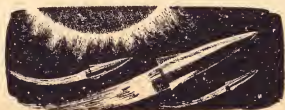
Warren held up his hands and called, "A miracle. A sign from the Great One. Down on your knees, everyone, we have had a sign. The Great One demands a new life, a united people!"

Alan sank and felt the others about him go down, one by one, then in twos and threes. Beside him he heard Sally say, "It might work at that. With an armed force of this size..." but whatever her reason she too sank down and with her the balance of the Wolf clan.

Standing beside Warren, Vivian looked out over the several hundred kneeling bodies, amazement spreading over her face. She chuckled finally, tossed her gun to the platform, and knelt in turn. Only Warren remained standing.

"A new day," he intoned.

And Alan, vaguely, in the back of his mind, wondered where man's scheming actually left off and miracle began. For here was a new nation born. Born of the miraculous fertility of man's mind—and whatever else is needed to guide his destiny.



final report

by NELSON BOND

*It rained very hard that night. The next day
It rained again—not just in fits and starts,
But all day long—a thick, insistent rain
That turned trim lawns to miniature lakes
And gutters into seething rivulets
That merged and hurled down every corner curb
Muddy Niagaras.*

*It was a penetrating rain
That made clothes damp and musty; a cloying rain
That seeped through every pore, short-circuiting
The edges of electric nerves, till all
Of us were petulant and quickly spurred
To curtness.*

*Or perhaps the sky did that:
The leaden sky. Psychologists agree
That colors affect us all subconsciously.
Yellow inspires, red excites, green soothes,
Blue tends to melancholy, and so on.
This sky was gray: a dull, gun-metal gray,
Constantly washed, yet somehow not quite clean—
Which doesn't make sense, I guess, but then
That's how it was. A sickly sky from which
The postulating rain dripped for three days.
A most unwelcome rain.*

No one cared greatly—no one was concerned—at first. It seemed incredible that this could happen to the world everyone knew so well... Nelson Bond, distinguished name in the field and author of THE BAL LAD OF BLASTER BILL, makes a topical contribution to SF verse.

*Nobody wanted it
Except the farmers. They like plenty of rain.
But people took it philosophically.
On every side you heard the trite remarks.
Everyone said, "Nice weather for ducks," and asked,
"Is it wet enough for you?" All the corny gags
That caused Charles Dudley Warner to complain,
"Everyone's always talking about the weather,
But no one ever does anything about it."
O.K., so what? He was absolutely right.
But what was there to do except let it rain?
And rain it did. Three days.*

*It stopped at last,
And the blue sky appeared again, washed clean,
Dotted with mounds of saucer-bottomed clouds
Thrusting fat, whipped-cream peaks to the welcome sun.
The normal pace of daily life resumed.
Housewives hung out their wash on billowing lines.
The weekend golfers polished up their clubs
And put them in their cars. The kids dragged out
Their bats and balls and gloves and galloped off
To drying diamonds on the corner lots.
The rain was over. Things were back once more
To normal. Folks forgot about the rain.*

*Oh, there were a few phenomena, a few
Statistical facts worth noting. The papers said
The recent three day rain had been unique
In that it covered not just part, but all
Of North America. The Weather Bureau
Reported that its instruments had measured
I forget how many inches—anyway, the most
Ever to fall in the United States
In seventy-two consecutive hours. And
Eventually the government acknowledged
What many amateur meteorologists
Had volubly suspected all along:
That secretly, on a Pacific isle
Thousands of miles away—an island with
A name nobody ever heard before,
A new design of A-bomb had been tried.
The test, they said, had been a great success.
Our nation now possessed a better weapon
Bigger than any ever built before;
A fission-fusion-fission type of bomb.
—Which meant darned little to the average man*

*But registered enough so listeners
Could chuckle when a television comic
Cracked, "What's the confusion about? Who's going fission?"*

*No one cared greatly. No one was concerned.
We'd been through this too many times before.
The scientists knew what they were about.
Once, years ago, when all of this began
People got mildly panicky; you heard talk
Of fall-out, radiation, chain reaction—
That sort of thing. A lot of poppycock!
Ignorant propaganda. There was nothing to worry about
Unless you were some damn fool Japanese
Who sailed a split-seamed fishing boat
Too close to the forbidden testing zone.
There was nothing to worry about. The rain was over.
The sun was out again*

*And then, one day,
In the parched silence of the desertland
Of Arizona, where a short time since
For three incredible days unlikely rain
Had sought to slake the thirst of insatiable sands,
A solitary prospector, seeking ores
With which to make still bigger, better bombs,
By merest chance (sheer carelessness, no doubt,
Because he wasn't feeling quite himself that day;
His bones ached, and he had a touch of fever),
Happened to turn his bloodhound instrument
Not on the rocky soil, but on himself,
And stood benumbed with wonder and with doubt
To hear his Geiger counter clicking off
The dwindling moments of the human race...*



shapes in the sky

by CIVILIAN SAUCER
INTELLIGENCE

What about the smells from the sky reported by some UFO witnesses—but not by others? What causes this?

"I HAVE been impressed with the frequent occurrence of sulphurousness with things that come from the sky," wrote Charles Fort in *The Book of the Damned* (1919). But, in contrast to Fort, we have been impressed with how *seldom* there are odors—"sulphurous" or otherwise—associated with unidentified aerial objects. As we have pointed out (F.U. Nov. 1957), cases reporting sounds from UFOs are by no means numerous; but there are ten cases involving sounds for every case involving odor.

Of course, one would expect to be able to smell a UFO only when it was at close range, which does not happen too often; but even among the reports of close approaches, mention of odor is the exception rather than the rule. We will describe some of the exceptions.

Fort himself quotes very few instances of "sulphurous" shapes in the sky, but one that he does cite is remarkable in several respects. On June 18, 1845, the captain of the brig *Victoria* saw three luminous bodies issue from the sea about half a mile away from his vessel.

The Research Section of Civilian Saucer Intelligence now discusses olfactory phenomena, "smells from the sky," in their seventh column on UFO sightings and reports, written specially for this magazine. CSI publishes a newsletter and has an extensive file of material on this subject.

These bodies remained visible for ten minutes, and spread "a stench of sulphur." The *Victoria* was then about twelve miles south of the port of Adalia (present-day Antalya), in the Gulf of Adalia, on the southern coast of Asia Minor; she was *not* 900 miles east or west of Adalia, as incorrectly stated in Fort—the longitude given on p. 274 should be 30°, not 13°.

The spectacle was also reported by the Rev. F. Hawlett, F.R.A.S., in Adalia, who described it as a single body which broke up, and gave its duration as twenty minutes to half an hour. An observer at "Mt. Lebanon" (300 miles to the southeast, if this means Lebanon on the Syrian coast) not only saw two of these "bodies," but described them as five times the apparent size of the full moon, and as adorned with strange "sail-like or streamer-like" appendages, "looking like large flags blown out by a gentle breeze," which seemed to connect the two objects. These appendages were not themselves luminous: "they seemed to shine by light from the main bodies." They were visible for an hour; however, the observer mentions no odor. These accounts, published sixteen years after the occurrence (*Repts. B.A.A.A.*, 1861, p. 30) and in garbled form, furnish all that we know of this unique event.

Since sulphur is odorless, a "stench of sulphur" cannot be taken literally. Many foul-smelling compounds contain sulphur, but the traditional "brimstone" smell is that of burning sulphur, which produces the gas sulphur dioxide.

Sulphur dioxide characteristically "catches one by the throat" and causes immediate wheezing, choking, and a feeling of suffocation; it was the killing component in the deadly smogs of the Meuse Valley of Belgium in 1930, of Donora, Pennsylvania, in 1918 and of London in 1953. As we shall see there is reason to think that it was present in the effluvia of at least three flying saucers seen, heard, and smelled at close range within the past five years.

Between 1845 and 1952, we know of only one report of an odoriferous UFO. Whether this was "sulphurous" cannot be determined from the description. According to Frank Quintana of Denver, Colorado, on January 29, 1950 he was climbing a foothill of South Table Mountain, in Colorado, when his attention was attracted by a whirring noise. He turned and saw a "silvery-green" object, about sixty feet in diameter, hovering only fifty feet above the ground. It was shaped like a ball flattened on top and bottom, encircled by what appeared to be a ro-

volving band about three feet wide. From its base flashed a greenish light. Quintana fell to the ground, from which position he watched the strange object for several minutes as it landed slowly in a small ravine near him, then suddenly shot up again and out of sight at tremendous speed, with a "rush of air." After it had gone, Quintana said, he detected "a pungent odor which remained in the area after the object had ascended." (Arnold & Palmer, *The Coming of the Saucers*, 1952, p. 145.)

Whether by mere coincidence or not, in the last two weeks of August and in early September, 1952, no less than five instances of UFO odors were reported, two of them famous and sensational "landing reports."

The first of these was the "Florida Scoutmaster case." It has been the subject of much controversy, and its status is still unsettled. In its favor are the remarkable similarities between this story and others, better-attested, which occurred *afterwards*; the testimony of three Boy Scouts who watched from a distance; and certain traces found on the scene. On the other hand, investigation by the Air Force's Project Blue Book uncovered certain derogatory information concerning the Scoutmaster's background, which led them to take a very dim view of his

credibility; and it is known that his story after repeated tellings included some very astonishing details which were absent from it at first. To be sure, there is no evidence that UFOs take care to show themselves only to people with untainted backgrounds; but these circumstances are hardly reassuring. However, we give the story here, as pieced together from local news items and from Ruppelt's account in his book *The Report on Unidentified Flying Objects* (Doubleday, 1956).

On the night of August 19, 1952, D. S. (Sonny) DesVergers, a Scoutmaster in West Palm Beach, Florida, was driving three Boy Scouts home along a lonely road skirting the Everglades, when he noticed a group of lights "strung in a level row, like the windows of an airliner," plunge into the woods. The boys did not see this; but a short distance farther on, all four saw them, apparently at treetop level. Curious as to what this could be, DesVergers turned the car around and went back. Taking a flashlight and machete with him, he started off into the pine woods to investigate, advising the boys that if he didn't return in ten minutes, they were to go to a farmhouse up the road and phone the sheriff. The boys watched him disappear into the darkness, occasionally

catching sight of the beam of his flashlight among the trees.

As DesVergers told the story to Ruppelt, the first unusual thing he noticed as he made his way through a heavy palmetto thicket was a faint but "sharp" or "pungent" odor. Emerging from the thicket into a clearing, he suddenly felt an "oppressively moist heat" around him, and found it "hard to breathe." Almost at once he had "the horrible feeling that someone was watching me." Then he was conscious of a hissing sound, "like a tire going down." He took another step forward, stopped, and "looked up at the stars to get my bearings." He saw only darkness overhead. Turning his flashlight upward, he saw that almost the whole sky was hidden by a large circular object no more than ten feet above his head. Dirty grey in color, and looking more like "linoleum" than metal, it had a grain to it "which ran north and south." Panic-stricken, he stumbled backwards to get out from under this thing. Simultaneously, the object began moving away from him, its far edge tilting upward so that its top portion came into view. It was hemispherical, with the bottom slightly convex; spaced around the thick, three-foot rim were vaned sections "like ventilators," each containing

a nozzle; on top was a kind of turret.

An opening now appeared in this turret, with a slight sound "like a well-oiled safe door opening." From it emerged a small ball of red fire which drifted slowly toward him, expanding into a cloud of red mist. "It had a sickening, nauseating stench—worse than rotten eggs—more like burning flesh." Flinging up his hands over his face, he lost consciousness as the mist enveloped him.

Back on the road, the scouts saw something go off in the woods that "showered sparks all over the area like a Roman candle." They ran to the farmhouse and blurted out what had happened. Deputy Sheriff Mott Partin and an assistant were called to investigate. When the boys took them back to the spot where DesVergers had left them, they encountered him just emerging from the woods, so excited that he was incoherent. He had dropped his flashlight, but still carried the machete. "He was a sorry sight," Partin said. "He was talking a blue streak, but he didn't make any sense." The backs of his hands and arms, and his hair, were singed; his cap was scorched, and a couple of small holes were burnt in it.

Intelligence officers at a nearby air field were notified immediately, and Cap-

tain Ruppelt, in Dayton, Ohio, was advised of the incident. The next day he arrived at the scene to make a personal investigation. To him, the story sounded authentic,—that is, until DesVergers told the press that "the Air Force and I know what this thing was, but I'm not allowed to tell because it would create a panic," and hired a press agent. Investigators at Dayton, who had examined the cap, reported that they did not think it had been on anyone's head when it was scorched. Finally, a check on the Scoutmaster's background indicated that he had a poor record for reliability—indeed, he was said to have been "given to spinning wild yarns." Soured by these developments, as he well might be, Ruppelt unhesitatingly wrote the case off as a hoax (*True*, May, 1954) in spite of the Scouts' corroborating testimony. But by the time his book appeared, Ruppelt was no longer so sure. It had proved impossible to account in any normal way for the fact that the roots of grass in the clearing appeared to have been charred. The only explanation he could think of was that a powerful alternating magnetic field just above the ground could, conceivably, have heated it by induced eddy currents—"induction heating."

Although Ruppelt says

that "we wrote it off as a hoax", the official Blue Book evaluation was that the case, while suspect, could not be classified as a proven hoax, and must remain an "Unknown." Ten weeks after the event, a remarkable, because apparently spontaneous, press release was issued by the Air Force:

"Washington, Nov. 6 (INS).— The Air Force announced today that two of last summer's 'flying saucer' reports have been thoroughly investigated and that they remain unexplained. One of the 'saucers,' said to have burned a Scout leader's hand when he walked under it, was reported Aug. 19, at West Palm Beach, Florida. The other, which a radio engineer said took off perpendicularly at a distance of 100 yards, was reported August 25 at Pittsburg, Kansas. The Air Force said: "In neither case was sufficient evidence available upon which to base a conclusion. The incidents remain unexplained."

(The Pittsburgh, Kansas, incident referred to here was the Squyres case, which we recounted in our November article.)

Three weeks after the sensational but equivocal DesVergers case, and a thousand miles to the north, there occurred a flying-saucer incident which is not only one of the most sensational ever reported, but also one of the

best authenticated. It was looked into immediately by two highly competent UFO researchers, Gray Barker and Ivan Sanderson, both of whom were convinced from their independent investigations that the story should be accepted as genuine. The account we give here is abbreviated from Sanderson's unpublished report, together with some details from Barker's (FATE, Jan. 1953; *They Knew Too Much About Flying Saucers*, University Books, 1956.)

Just after sunset, three boys playing football in the village of Flatwoods, in central West Virginia, saw a red-luminous object pass overhead and apparently land on a nearby ridge. They thought they had seen a fireball strike the ground, and started toward the ridge to search for meteorites. As they did so, they noticed with amazement that a pulsating orange light was still visible on the hilltop, and they concluded (correctly, as it proved) that what had come down was not a meteor but a flying saucer. On the way to the spot they collected four other boys, the oldest being Eugene Lemon, 17; the mother of two of the boys, local beautician Mrs. Kathleen May; and a dog.

The party mounted the ridge path until they were within about fifty feet of the strange thing, which was now seen to be a very large

pear-shaped object about thirty feet high, sitting in the tall weeds to the right of the path, and pulsating from dull red to bright orange. All agreed that this light was not that of incandescence, but was a luminosity like that of a neon tube, which radiated no heat. The object's "real" color, they thought, was black. Some say that they heard a loud hissing sound, accompanied by a dull thumping as of an engine or a heartbeat. The ground ahead was overspread with a low mist. The dog, which had run ahead, turned tail and ran yelping back down the trail. Advancing a few feet farther, all smelled a *choking odor unlike anything in their experience*; some compared it to "hot, greased metal," some to "burning sulphur"—it was a "hot" odor, sickening, and irritating to the nose and throat. "It seemed to grip you in the throat and suffocate you." They experienced, too, just as DesVergers had reported, a sense of oppressive heat and humidity.

All had been staring at the luminous object, but at this moment Mrs. May noticed two luminous "eyes" off to the left of the path. One of the boys shone his flashlight in that direction and they all saw something shaped rather like the head and trunk of a giant broad-shouldered man, floating in midair just below

the bough of an oak tree. (This bough was later found to be twelve feet from the ground.) The "face," if such it was, was red, and the only features the terrified witnesses made out were the two luminous "eyes," which projected pale-blue beams into the misty air. Around this "face" was a dark, pointed "monk's hood" appearance, "shaped like the ace of spades"; the "body" beneath it was a dark green. Mrs. May afterwards said she had seen small arms ending in long talons, but none of the boys noticed any such feature. The lower part of the figure was not seen.

At sight of this terrifying apparition, Lemon fell backward in a momentary faint. As they hauled him to his feet again, they saw that the entity was "drifting" closer to them. At this, all fled pell-mell in hysterical terror, half a mile back down the ridge to the May house. Several required first aid; according to Mrs. May, they vomited for hours afterwards. It was three days before Eugene Lemon had fully recovered from the effects.

A posse that went up the ridge less than an hour afterward found nothing there. A. Lee Stewart, local editor, was the next to visit the site; he noticed nothing out of the ordinary until he put his head to the ground, but then, sure enough, he smelt an un-

recognizable, irritating odor, which "constricted the nasal and throat passages." Next morning it was found that the weeds were crushed, and the ground itself depressed, in a circular area fifteen feet wide. Two saucer investigators who arrived later that day reported finding six symmetrically-placed holes in the ground, and grass spotted as though by a dark liquid; but when Sanderson and Barker arrived some days later, they were unable to verify these details.

No one has been able to think of any plausible "natural" explanation for this weird and terrifying experience, and hoax, fortunately, can be ruled out. It seems entirely probable that here we have a genuine observation—albeit a very brief one—of a UFO occupant or "spaceman," apparently wearing a protective suit of some kind. The gas encountered, to judge by the description of its effects, may very well have contained sulphur dioxide. Sanderson has speculated that this construction, and perhaps also its unfortunate occupant, may have been rapidly dissolving in our "hostile" atmosphere, and that the noxious mist that surrounded it may have been produced by this process of destructive corrosion.

Thirty-three hours later, again in Florida—in fact, only 35 miles west of the

spot where DesVergers came stumbling out of the palmettoes—another aerial object descended and spread an irritating odor. This object, although observed so soon after the Flatwoods saucer, bore no resemblance to it—but it did resemble somewhat the object described by DesVergers.

At 4:30 a.m. on September 14, 1952, Fred J. Brown, an employee of the Everglades Experimental Station in Belle Glade, Florida, was preparing to milk the Station's cattle when he noticed a loud humming sound, "like that made by high-voltage electric wires." He went to the door of the barn to investigate and found that all the cattle had bolted to the far end of the pasture, about a quarter of a mile away.

Looking up, Brown was amazed to see a circular object approximately 35 feet in diameter, with a row of red and amber lights spaced alternately around the outside rim on the underside. It appears that these lights were not rotating. At first Brown thought it might be a blimp, but then he saw that the object had no motor or propeller. He was unable to discern any openings or "windows." The object, only 70 feet above the ground, "seemed to settle over the barn until it descended to a height of approximately 40 feet," then veered to the west

and disappeared from view.

Although unnerved, Brown went out after the cattle and had succeeded in getting them all back to the barn when the UFO returned, this time from the south and going in a northerly direction. He estimated its speed as approximately 30 miles an hour. The glow from the object was bright enough to light up the ground as it passed over, and it gave off *a peculiar odor, which he described as "acid, yet smelling somewhat like ammonia."* The odor was so strong it made his eyes smart and burned his nostrils. (Since he mentions no choking sensation, this was probably *not* sulphur dioxide.) The object gained altitude and disappeared to the north over Lake Okeechobee, but not before the cattle had again stampeded to the far end of the pasture.

Brown attempted to rouse the occupants of two houses across the road, but the UFO had passed out of sight before he could awaken them.

It was 5:20 before he again had the nervous cattle herded for milking, and their milk production that morning was only two-thirds what it should have been. (Miami *Daily News*, Sept. 16, 1952.)

Eight days later came the last of these closely-grouped incidents; and, as we should have learned to expect by now, the UFO's seen on this

occasion were different in appearance and behavior from any of the preceding. Whether the odor, too, differed cannot be determined from the information available (*Washington Star, News, and Times-Herald* of Sept. 22). In this case, it was the odor that first drew attention to the objects. Shortly after midnight on September 22, Mrs. F. L. Hazelwood, living near Centreville, Virginia (20 miles from Washington, D.C.), "smelled something awful" in her back yard. Her husband also smelt it, and wondered if something were burning nearby. They stepped out, and found the yard brightly illuminated—"just like the early morning sun," according to their daughter Marie—by light from three or four brilliant, round objects in the sky overhead. They called the police. Soon most of the 100 residents of Centreville were calling the police, many in panic. Three policemen and a police sergeant responded, and all confirmed the presence, in the cloudy sky, of several brilliant white balls of fire which "went in and out of the clouds" and "played tag." One policeman spoke also of blue and red balls of fire; to the suggestion of searchlight reflections he replied, "No siree! They were solid objects!" "Weird indeed" was the comment of another witness. One of the objects amused itself for some

time by descending toward the police station, where it would "get real bright, make a circle, fade out, and climb back up again... It just kept that up." The brightness was compared to "a big auto headlight—it lighted up the sky." The brilliant objects continued their aerial ballet until 4 a.m., when they finally disappeared in the direction of Washington, D. C. Radar operators at Washington National Airport and Andrews Air Force Base said the objects did not show up on their screens. Mrs. Hazelwood, according to her daughter, was made ill by the odor.

During this same August-September period, on the other side of our planet, Miss Gertrude James of Melbourne, Australia, saw "a noiseless green ball flying too fast to be a plane, and not fast enough to be a meteor," on the night of August 30. According to the next day's Reuters dispatch, she said "it smelled like a rotten egg." No further details are given, but this description identifies the smell as hydrogen sulphide. A curiously similar instance of odor from a green fireball is mentioned on page 125 of Jimmy Guieu's book, *Les Soucoupes Volantes Viennent d'un Autre Monde* (Editions Fleuve Noir, Paris, 1954). On October 13, 1953, at 7:30 p.m., a "flying cigar" was seen by

hundreds of witnesses in many places in Duex-Sevres (western France). Its luminosity lit up the ground like bright moonlight. It was not a fireball in the ordinary sense, for its course, according to Guieu, was capricious: its yellowish, sparkling trail traced circles in the sky. Over Thouars, where it appeared as a greenish fireball with a train, it exploded noiselessly; and after the explosion, according to witnesses, "*the air was impregnated with a strong odor of ether.*" Probably no one could confuse hydrogen sulphide with ether; so these two green fireballs must have smelled different. But there is one other case in which hydrogen sulphide was reported: a unique occurrence, which furnished an authentic specimen of fragments from a fireball-type UFO.

Shortly after 9 p.m. on August 20, 1953 (not quite a year after the Melbourne stinkball), a resident of New Haven, Connecticut, saw a "streak of light" go by her window. Almost immediately, she heard a loud "explosion" that shook the house, and caused her house lights to dim momentarily. She and others hurried outside to investigate, and saw smoke curling from a ragged foot-square hole in a signboard 200 feet away, made of 20-gauge steel. Only one man, a motorist driving past, had seen what had smashed through it. He

had seen "a red ball of fire about 6 inches in diameter, trailing a tail," emerge from the signboard. Passing about 30 feet in front of his car, it had torn through the top of a large tree, just missing telephone wires and disappeared at very high speed on a rising trajectory.

There were no marks of heat on the sign, but whatever crashed through had left metallic deposits on the jagged steel edges of the hole. These were collected by saucer investigator August Roberts, and were found on analysis to consist of pure copper. It had also left behind it a *strong stench of rotten eggs*. (Source: Albert Bender's now-defunct *Space Review*, Oct. 1953.)

The most recent example of a "smell from the sky" is once more in the "sulphurous" group, like Adalia and Flatwoods, but it set a remarkable precedent: for the first time an employee has drawn disability compensation as a result of an encounter with an unidentified flying object. On November 26, 1956, a New Jersey State Workmen's Compensation referee awarded medical compensation to a night watchman who testified that an encounter with a UFO had made him ill and affected his senses of smell, taste, and touch. The referee, Leonard B. Willits, ducked the issue of what if anything, had been

seen by the watchman 66-year-old Harry J. Sturdevant, saying merely that "he *thought* he saw something, and it was his duty to investigate"; however, Sturdevant not only "thought" he saw something but "thought" it caused him injuries, and the reality of these injuries was apparently not disputed. Sturdevant's story, as told to Trentonian reporter Emil Slaboda, appeared in *Fate*, June, 1957.

At 3:45 a.m. on October 2, 1956, Mr. Sturdevant, on duty for the Herbert Elkins construction firm of Trenton, N.J., was standing by the Delaware River, just opposite Rotary Island. "Suddenly it appeared, first as a red light in the sky above the Reading Railroad bridge about a mile up the river. In a matter of seconds it shot down past me, only about 15 feet above the water, and 50 yards away. Then it shot upwards about 500 feet and disappeared. It was 60 to 100 feet long and about 15 feet in diameter, shaped like a cigar. It had no wings and no fins—I heard no propulsion from it except a hissing sound like escaping steam." (Compare this with what was reported by DesVergers and the Flatwoods witnesses.) "It gave me the greatest shock of my life. *There was a smell like sulphur or brimstone.* It was something I had never smelled before. I don't know what it

was except it was very nauseating and it made me very sick. I lost my sense of taste and smell; my throat would not swallow properly." Sturdevant told Slaboda that he had collapsed in pain after the object had disappeared, but had managed to crawl to his parked car. "I stayed there for half an hour before I was competent to drive." Finally he was able to drive to a phone from which he called the police. Six weeks later, his sense of taste and touch were still impaired and he had been able to work only a few days.

Slaboda was able to uncover two confirmatory observations—one from a 5-year-old boy living nearby who saw "a big lighted ball with a tail," the other from Trentonian route manager Peter Borza, who was near Cadwalader Park, two blocks from the river, shortly before 4 a.m. when he caught sight of a luminous object "about the size of the moon" high in the sky. His description differed only slightly from Sturdevant's, the main discrepancy being that Sturdevant described it as glowing red, whereas it appeared white when Borza saw it.

It cannot be positively affirmed that the nauseating and poisonous gas given off by this UFO was sulphur dioxide (which would be expected to cause respiratory trouble), but we note that the

witness does compare it to "brimstone."

By now the reader may be wondering whether saucer odors are invariably repulsive and toxic; don't UFOs ever smell *pleasant*? Well, hardly ever. We know of just two instances. At 3:45 p.m. on October 5, 1954—at the height of the spectacular European "landing wave" of that autumn—a luminous UFO was seen a few miles from Beaumont (north of Paris). This object approached the witnesses, at the same time losing its luminosity, until it was within 150 yards of them. They declared that they then felt a strange sensation and were "as if nailed to the ground." At the same moment, they smelled, "*a strong odor of nitrobenzene*" (which smells like almonds). After a short time, the object moved away, and the smell and the feeling of paralysis ceased. (Paris *Le Figaro* and Charleville *L'Ardennais*, Oct. 7,

1954.) This tale may possibly be exaggerated, or even fictitious, but aside from the nitrobenzene, it resembles scores of other, apparently authentic, incidents reported at that time. And in March 1955 a witness to an alleged saucer landing near Cincinnati, Ohio declared that as he drove away to fetch the sheriff, he noticed a *strong smell of "almonds and alfalfa."*

Why this small group of UFO witnesses have reported marked odors, while numerous others—just as close to an "object" as the first group, or even closer—make no mention of any smell, is one of the countless puzzles of the UFO problem. It is a known fact that the sense of smell weakens when the individual is excited or apprehensive, and perhaps this partly accounts for the contradiction. However, it may also be true that most UFOs actually do not diffuse any very strong odor into the surrounding air.

NEXT MONTH —

Featuring *three* exciting new novelets by

STANLEY MULLEN, HARRY HARRISON and THOMAS N. SCORTIA

in addition to

IVAN T. SANDERSON writing on CONTINENTS IN SPACE

MORRIS K. JESSUP writing on FLYING SAUCERS and CIVILIAN SAUCER INTELLIGENCE's SHAPES IN THE SKY

— in *FANTASTIC UNIVERSE*

contest on Venus

by JOHN REYNOLDS

He knew there'd be a rematch on Earth that would draw a million, and ten percent of that purse sounded very good.

MOOSE MCGURK, the Wilderness Wildman, stepped onto the aisle belt and moved towards the contest circle. His coach, his technical advisor, his interpreter, his valet, his valet's assistant, his script writer, his director, and an aging teleplanetvision actress, hired to play the part of his mother, followed in that order down the moving aisle belt.

None of these people however were necessary for the contest for this time Moose McGurk was scheduled to lose. His world's championship title was not at stake, his end of the purse was not at stake, for that matter it was already bet at rather poor odds right there on Venus, that the all-Venus champ would win.

There was nothing at stake for Moose McGurk except his professional reputation. He was the only Wrestler on Earth that people would even offer to bet as much as a dime on. Of course there were never any takers for Moose McGurk never lost and most people believed that he fought on the level too. Of course he didn't but most

Twenty-nine-year-old John Reynolds, a school teacher in California, contributes this unique report on wrestling—inter-planetary style—in a not too distant future. The rules haven't changed too much, really, as new and different Terrible Turks do battle in a more streamlined Tomorrow.

people believed that he did anyway.

Moose wiped his forehead, something that he would never do back on Earth. He had never sweated over a match before. He used to sweat some before a fight in the woodlands where he was discovered, but those were real fights, where the winner wasn't discussed before the fight but afterwards.

Somehow this was different with Moose. He didn't mind wrestling to a script when he knew that he could beat the man anyway. What difference did it make if you put in a little entertainment if you could beat the man anyway. Well this time there wasn't going to be any entertainment put in. This time there wasn't any script. This time Moose was fighting without a script like the fights back in the lumber camps, only there was a difference. This time Moose was fighting to lose. Well it could be worse he thought, he could be fighting to lose with entertainment put in. Moose told himself he would never let things come to that. He had been saving his money so just that type of thing could never happen to him.

Besides there was going to be a rematch on Earth that ought to draw a million. And ten percent of the organization's share of the purse was a lot of money. He wished he was one of the fighters of

the old days he had heard talk about. Ninety percent to the fighter and ten to the manager. That couldn't be true though. Why the most anyone ever got these days was fifteen.

He stepped off the aisle belt onto the three step escalator and rode up to the contour chair. He lay down in the chair and, while he waited for his crew to start the warm-up act he looked around for the organization's Mister Biggers, the producer and boss of the whole outfit.

"Big day," Moose said to his valet, "Mister Biggers is here to watch. Even waved to me when he knocked the ash off his cigar."

"Yea yea, would you be quiet? You're cramping my act. I got to work too you know."

Moose thought that the valet was overdoing it even for a valet but charged it off to his being watched by the boss.

The valet's assistant stood at attention as usual but even he looked a little nervous.

His coach was next and as he pointed at the rival champ from Venus he demonstrated that the first attack should be made with the lumberjack chop. Which if he ever used in a fight would probably result in him being crippled for life. Still it looked good and that's what counted. Straight wrestling as he once found out not only was boring

to the fans but it was likely to get you fired. He lay back farther in his contour chair and said, "This sure beats those hard bunks back in the lumber camps."

The coach replied, "Shut up will you? Do you want me to forget my lines?"

When he had finished his performance the sound system started to broadcast the rules. His interpreter ignoring the escalator jumped up onto the platform and started to gesture wildly.

Moose watched a full minute and couldn't understand a word he said. "Just what did the guy say?"

He went on for another minute and then he leaned over and said, "Would you stop interrupting the acts? We got our jobs too you know."

Moose grabbed him and pulled him down face to face, "I'm not asking you again. What are the rules?"

"Come on Moose, take it easy. You know I don't understand this Venus talk."

Moose shook him and the crowd booed. Moose lifted him up with one hand and shook him again.

"O.K. O.K. No eye gouging and no straight punching."

"And what else?"

"Nothing else, anything goes."

Moose put him down. The The interpreter ignored the escalator and jumped off the platform. The crowd laughed.

Next was his aging mother's turn. As she rode up the escalator she took out a handkerchief and put on the biggest bawl act that Moose had ever seen. Bigger even than his real mother had put on when she had the job. He didn't have to worry about his mother though, her contract had been bought up with six months severance pay added on when she laughed one night instead of cried.

She went down and the vallet came up to wipe the tears off of Moose's shoulders and the rest of the show was up to Moose.

The bell sounded and the red light went on. Moose and his opponent jumped into the ring at the same time. Moose stood where he landed and waited. His opponent ran over to where Moose was standing, jumped up and kicked him in the stomach with both feet. Moose landed on his back and hit his head on the ring cover. He looked up and couldn't find the referee. His opponent got up first and tried a broad jump at Moose's head. Moose rolled out of the way and decided that if Thumper Jaroose could get along without the benefit of a referee so could he. He grabbed a leg and was kicked in the head by the other one. He let go and rolled away. The Thumper came at him again with another broad jump. Moose rolled out of the way again and got to his

feet. He looked once more for the referee and decided to forget about the rules for awhile until he could find out what had to be done to end the match. Thumper Jaroose ran at him again and jumped with both feet forward. Moose sidestepped, fell on him with a body press and waited for someone to start counting. No one counted. Moose held onto him as long as he could but Thumper Jaroose flailed and Moose let go.

The crowd roared at that as if they were now sure that Moose McGurk could not hold his man.

Moose jumped to his feet and made a diving tackle that brought the Thumper to the plastic covering. He pinned his man with an arm bar. The Thumper twisted and caught him in the face with an elbow. Moose held on and was smashed in the face twice more. He let go again.

The Thumper feinted an arm grab and kicked him in the face. Moose heard his nose crack and rolled to the floor. The Thumper jumped on his arm with both feet. Moose grabbed him with his free arm. He held on and pulled the Thumper to the floor. His nose got twisted and sent a sharp pain through his body. Moose realized then that the Thumper wasn't in on the plan. The Thumper was all out to win. He didn't know that he was scheduled

to win. Moose pinned his man again. As usual no one counted. This time he decided to hold on till he figured out how to lose to the Thumper without getting killed in the effort. As yet the only thing that the Thumper had tried to do was to disable him once he had him down.

Moose looked to his corner. He shouted, "What do I have to do to win this match?"

He couldn't ask about the rules for losing or the whole plan would be out in the open. One by one his fellow employees turned their heads. He looked into their faces for an answer. He searched for Mister Biggers, the producer. His eyes found him but found no sign of recognition.

The crowd booed and Moose remembered that he was in a fight, a fight that he didn't know what had to be done to become the winner, or what was even more important to become the loser. Moose tightened his grip and decided to take a minute to figure this thing out. The crowd's booing increased. Moose got mad but held on. The crowd's booing increased even more. Moose hated to have things interrupt his thinking. He pounded the only thing that was near, Thumper Jaroose. The crowd cheered wildly. Moose thought of the lumber camp fights as he heard the crowd cheering him on. He smashed the Thumper again and the crowd went mad. Moose sud-

denly realized what had to be done to win a match on Venus. In order to win he would have to disable his opponent. In order to lose he would have to become disabled. His grip loosened as he was thinking.

Thumper Jaroose broke loose with a tremendous flail kick and sprang to his feet.

Moose got up and waited to see what the Thumper would do next. The Thumper put his head down and charged at Moose's midsection. Moose waited and saw for the first time in his wrestling career a legitimate opportunity to use the lumberjacks' chop. He raised his arms as if he had a double bladed axe in his hands and smashed the Thumper on the back of the head just as he was about to smash into Moose's ribs. The crowd screamed as the Thumper fell to the floor. It seemed as if all Mars had broken loose, Venusians were climbing all over the ring and slapping him on the back. They picked him up and carried him down the aisle. The band struck up a victory march. Moose felt good all over; it was the first real fight he had won since he had started wrestling professionally ten years ago.

Then the thought struck him, not only had he won his first honest fight since the lumber camp days, he had just won his last setup. There could be no rematch on Earth with the Thumper as he had beaten him on his home grounds. There would be no more matches on Earth at all because he was sure to be fired. He hadn't followed instructions. There would be no second chance. His mother never had gotten a second chance and neither would he.

They carried him into his dressing room. None of his Earth friends were there. He was out of a job for sure. The screaming and cheering had stopped. There was a silence that only a loser could hear and feel.

Then he heard a chant in the Venusian that he could not understand as the door to his dressing room opened. Reporters came in, a teleplanet-vision crew came in. They were asking him questions he couldn't understand.

"Interpreter, interpreter," he yelled.

Someone spoke in Earth Universal, "They want to know when you'll be ready to have a rematch with Thumper Jaroose, on Venus."

WATCH FOR HARRY HARRISON'S EXCITING
"OPEN ALL DOORS" NEXT MONTH!

madness

in

aezaeliet

by **MARGARET S. HUNT**

It had been a cruel civilization which has killed those meant to live, giving life to others who wanted only death.

YEMM leaned on the tiller and watched the horizon from under heavy eyelids. Sunward, Aezaeliet made a precise dark shape in the wide, dazzling ocean. After the long months, Yemm could almost smell the land; but for the first time in his life, he was afraid of a homecoming.

In the bottom of the canoe, Ton stirred and whimpered.

"Is it still there?"

He hadn't been himself for two days.

"Of course! We're close, now. The wind's with us at last and the canoe is docile as a bride. Rest."

The young man closed his eyes.

Only Yemm and Ton were left of the crew that set out for the Greater Islands to trade cameos and mats for citrus fruits. Their apprentice had died first, of the incredible cold, in the land where the storm had driven them. It was hard for them to bow their heads over him and say, "It was time." Though he was the youngest of the crew, they had come to depend on him to talk frivolously and act seriously no matter what happened. The next to go was

Margaret S. Hunt, Queens housewife, writes that this would probably never have been written if her husband wasn't "an exceptionally patient and understanding man." First writing "seriously" in junior high, she continued through high school, college, various jobs and keeping house.

Caen, who had made the finest cameos in Aezaeliet until a tool slipped and numbed his right hand and almost took his reason. The life at sea had restored him: no one understood the sickness that killed first him and then the wayward son of the Chief Historian. Three young men, one by one, while the survivors resigned themselves piously and Yemm longed bitterly, blasphemously, for the arts of the ancient Sorcerers who did not say, "It was time," when their friends died. The Sorcerers would have known the diseases and their cure.

Now Ton, who had withstood so much, lay whining in the bottom of the empty sailing canoe; and Yemm wondered whether even the sight of home would save him. Ton's collapse dismayed Yemm more than any of the deaths. Since the young man's apprenticeship, the two of them had worked together like the two hands of one man, neither failing the other till now.

Ton rolled his head feverishly. "Yemm, it's too quiet! We ought to hear something by now. Are you sure it isn't a mirage?"

"I told you the wind's behind us." But Yemm too felt the silence.

"It's no use. After what we've seen, how could the Eternal Harmony let us go home? Maybe none of it was

real! Maybe we were too long bare-headed in the midday sun. Either we'll wake up in our own hammocks, or else we've gone mad and there's no place for us in Aezaeliet. Remember the story of Mad Paer? He only thought he saw the Sunset People, and Aezaeliet laughed at him till he swam out to sea to drown."

There are times when a man must pretend composure even before a friend. Yemm remembered well enough the boy who insisted he had actually seen the mythical descendants of the Sorcerers, with their unlikely cloud-pink faces and sunny hair and sky-blue eyes; but he smiled indulgently.

"I knew him, Ton. He was my friend. It was on his account my people apprenticed me to the sea."

"They'd have been appalled if they'd lived to know what came of it. But no one will know now."

Yemm's voice was admirably calm and matter-of-fact: "Ton, you'll be eating baked breadfruit by nightfall."

"And then we'll have to tell them what happened. We'll have to tell them we slaughtered four-legged animals and ate their flesh and wore their fur—" his voice trailed off in horror—"like the Sorcerers."

"Is that all we'll tell them? After all, our grandparents did that in the time of the famine."

Yemm couldn't answer. After a while he said aloud, "Aezaeliet is a good place, isn't it? I never thought of it one way or another before this year."

"You've never been homesick."

"Not until this trip. I never felt separated from Aezaeliet before. The sea is a road like any other. I go out on it to work, the way other men go to their fields or the fishing grounds. I'm gone longer, but when my work is done and I come home, I stay longer than they do. No, it isn't even a road. It's my own field, and the farthest I can go is still home."

"Even the other islands," Ton guessed.

"Even the other islands. Until this trip, of course."

"Yes. But I've never felt that way. I don't think the Eternal Harmony meant me to be a seaman, Yemm."

"Sometimes it's hard to tell what the Eternal Harmony means." Ton caught his breath, but Yemm had to go on: "We're taught there's a proper limit to everything and a secret Rhythm that guides us. We're taught that it's wrong to love too much or hate too much, to tamper with the time of death, to mourn too long or celebrate too wildly, even on the Days of Remembrance and of Beginnings. We're taught that it offends the Eternal Harmony if we ask too many questions

or try to do more than we can."

"Can you still doubt, after what we saw in the Cold Country?"

"I'm only learning to doubt since then. Maybe we set our limits too close. When children hear the hymns of the Day of Remembrance, wouldn't they be willing to die as the Sorcerers died if they could only do what the Sorcerers did?"

"Some children. But it is childishness, after all! We're men. We have to live according to our nature. Not like the Sorcerers, making themselves into birds and fish and tortoises and shooting stars."

"If I had lived according to my nature when I was a boy, I would have set out deliberately to find the City of the Sorcerers. My grandson Barr would now. Maybe you would have when you were a boy. A man forgets as he grows older, but this trip has brought a good many things back to me. Ton, the wildest orgy in Aezaeliet isn't the Festival of Beginnings. It's the Day of Remembrance, when we all wear mourning and talk only with our hands and intoxicate our brains with the legend of the Sorcerers. The many-colored men who listened to the moon and rode on the wind and made stone out of sand! We gather around a bonfire and sing *The Doom of the Sorcerers*, and we tell ourselves we are purifying our-

selves of extravagant thoughts. But we're drinking them in; and all that saves us from trying to mimic them that we believe they never really existed."

"Yemm! Please—"

"I'm sorry, Ton. You'd better sleep."

But Yemm needed someone to talk to, badly. Well, once they were ashore, before their homecoming was celebrated, he would be allowed time to recover and to be alone with his wife. Yemm liked his fellow-islanders, but it was only Zaeften and his grandson Barr that he really missed when he was away.

Within a few years, Barr would be his apprentice and the two of them would be men together and the loneliness that troubled Yemm even when he was with Zaeften would be gone. Even now there were few grown men Yemm found as congenial as his restless grandson. He had touched the secret of the renewal of life the day he found Barr sitting on the rocks above the beach and watching the gulls. "Grandpa, could the Sorcerers really fly?"

He should have said, "It's only a fable, Barr. Men can't fly. They weren't meant to. But they can sail, and that's like flying."

But what other boy would have asked such a question so earnestly and longingly, and of what man? They would

both have dreaded the laughter. Yemm wondered whether the cages and the beatings the Sorcerers used for discipline had hurt like the laughter of Aezaeliet. So, Yemm had watched the gulls with Barr, and said only, "I don't know. It's such an old story. But it's nice to think about."

Had he done wrong? If the Eternal Harmony makes men like Yemm and boys like Barr, can it expect them to go against their nature?

Two generations earlier Yemm had lain on those same rocks and looked up into the sky and imagined that it had no end. The notion had made him feel terrifyingly empty, as if he had swallowed some of that appalling vacancy. Yet he loved to frighten himself with that and one other: the idea of other worlds, wholly different from Aezaeliet. The Sorcerers! No wonder his parent had worried.

"It's only a fable, Yemm. A warning against going to extremes. The Eternal Harmony would never permit people to commit all those crimes, and then destroy them in a flaming hurricane."

After Mad Paer's suicide, Yemm learned to disguise his strange moods and almost to forget them. The sea is a good master for the wild ones. It gives them danger to subdue their fears and answer their recklessness; it gives them practical emergencies to harness their imagination; it

gives them strange new sights to fill their curiosity. However outlandishly strong are a man's body and will, the sea is stronger. Now mothers were glad to see their children run to Yemm and even old men listened to him. He no longer endangered Aezaeliet: he brought them their rice and citrus fruit, lumber and pearls, and news from neighboring islands.

But the news he brought this time—what would it do to the gracious integrity of Aezaeliet?

"Where are we?" Ton murmured. Yemm started as if Ton had wakened him out of a dream. "Is it still there?"

Yemm laid a reassuring hand upon his shoulder. "It's there. Very close now. We should reach it before the land breeze catches us."

"I still don't hear anything!"

It was no use talking about the wind now. They should have heard at least a snatch of song or shouting from the fishermen in the harbor. Suddenly, Yemm realized that he had not seen a single fishing boat, though the sun was only now dropping beyond the edge of the sea. With the light in their eyes, and the island in silhouette, they need not have expected to see people, but why were there no cooking fires on the shore?

Ton raised himself on one elbow, and saw what Yemm

had seen. "Yemm! Something is wrong!"

Yemm gathered all the arts of authority he had learned in all his years at sea. "Your illness has worked on your imagination." That was the way to check Ton.

The sun vanished. Firelight dawned inland and flickered among the palm fronds. "They've just lighted the bonfire," Yemm reported quietly, as if he'd known all along. "It's the Day of Remembrance."

In contrition for Yemm, Ton hastily covered his eyes and then his mouth with the back of his hand. To him, nothing could excuse knowingly desecrating the Day's holy silence. Yemm signaled that he would respect the holiday.

When the hymns rose on shore, Ton joined in faintly, half in piety and half in joy. Yemm too, his heart full, chanted with Aezaeliet the *Doom of the Sorcerers*.

*Hear, Aezaeliet, the history
of Nyark:*

Nyark the stubborn,

Nyark the proud,

*Nyark the ungoverned City
of the Sorcerers,*

*Nyark that challenged
Harmony and died
in fire and thunder.*

The waves, lifting and breaking, set the rhythm. Had anyone else heard it that way, summoning across the water?

Never, probably: all Aezaeliet contrived to be ashore for the holidays.

Neither Yemm nor Ton could take his eyes from the other's face. Yemm shivered as if a wind from the Cold Country had crossed his back. It's one thing to sing about a legendary city's destruction back beyond the horizon of time; it's another to have walked on its cracked pavements and slept in its dead houses and to be carrying against your body two fearfully life-like portraits of its people.

The canoe nudged the dock. Yemm lashed it to the pilings. The land odors swept over him in a dizzying wave: fish and damp earth and greenery, woodsmoke and fruit ripening and the heady fragrance of the Remembrance Tree in bloom. He found a heap of coconuts on the dock. He pierced the eyes of two and handed one to Ton.

It's a fast day, Ton signaled.

You know we're excused.

Ton drank, between the lines of the chant, and smiled. When the coconuts were drained, Yemm signaled, *We'll go ashore now.*

Ton lifted the palms of his hands to say he couldn't stand alone.

I'll carry you.

How can you? You're exhausted. With all respect due my captain, Yemm, go find

Zaefien and send my wife and her brothers to me.

Yemm agreed. Ton's self-discipline was returning to him, and that was good. Reeling a little, Yemm started up the slope toward the town. Behind him Ton was still chanting. Yemm joined in again, softly. Soon Ton's voice was overwhelmed by the chorus of landsmen, ahead. Yemm plucked a tuft of grass from beside the path and laid it against his cheek and smelled the green sap and the dank roots and the soil. He had been away so long! In the Cold Country most of the plants had been dead or in a mysterious sleep.

They invaded the earth;

They invaded the sky;

They invaded the sea.

They watched a living heart as it pulsed.

They listened to the talk of fish under the sea.

They devised moons and made recipes for stars.

THE FIRELIGHT was brilliant now. It turned the surrounding foliage into a shimmering screen against the night. When Yemm reached the rim of the shallow amphitheatre where all Aezaeliet was gathered, he paused, overcome at the familiar sight of all those gray-robed figures. No one noticed him. The quivering flames and the words of the chant and the mood of this holiest of days

held them in a trance. Somewhere in the crowd, with his daughter Maelie and her husband, Barr would be drinking in the old legend; and tomorrow, unless Yemm corrected her, Maelie would be telling Barr it was only a fable.

He saw many friends, but he couldn't find his own family. It was only when his eye fell on Ton's wife, hooded in personal mourning that he knew why. The ship had been given up for lost.

He moved quietly to her side and touched her shoulder. At the sight of him her eyes went wide. She drew back. He smiled to reassure her.

Ton is alive, he told her in sign language. He's ill, but recovering now. I left him in the canoe at Trader's Dock. Go with your brothers and take him home.

She gave him a slow, wondering smile. *And the others?*

It was time. For once the sign for that—bowed head cupped palms uplifted helplessly—seemed wholly natural. Time! Time for unripe men who had yet to see a grandchild!

She covered her eyes with the back of her hand and then gestured, *I'll tell their families. Zaefien is over there.* She went to get her brothers.

Across the circle from him, Zaefien's beautiful face under her gray hood was unutterably sad. He remembered her tell-

ing Maelie once, "Other men die, but a seaman may just sail away. You never know." And to Yemm she had said. "I love you for being a seaman—but I wish you weren't." How should he announce himself to her?

Before he could decide, she raised her eyes and saw him. He could almost hear her sigh. Quietly, without disturbing the ceremony he went to her.

She gave him a strange, uneasy smile. Her hand curled searchingly around his arm. *Yes, it was really Yemm. It had been a long, hard trip, but he was alive. He needed only food and rest, and comfort, because he was profoundly troubled.* In answer, her touch welcomed him lovingly and gratefully.

That was all the communication they needed. At her side he added his voice to the chant once more.

She was starrier than the night sky;

She was more populous and more turbulent than the sea.

Nyark the luminous,

Nyark the brash

Nyark the City of the Sorcerers.

There were tears on Zaefien's cheeks, and Yemm's own eyes were wet. The most tranquil man in the most tranquil year of his life never passed the Day of Remembrance unmoved. This homecoming,

this beloved ritual, the assembly of lifelong neighbors and kin, lifted Yemm's heart like a great wave out of the trough where the voyage had dropped it. With all Aezaeliet he mourned the unattainable things the legendary Nyark meant to them; alone of all this gathering, he mourned a flesh and blood race whose spirits had been his hosts in a strange land. Since the disaster, time and Harmony had gentled the stark lines the Sorcerers loved; but Yemm believed he knew how Nyark had looked at the height of its pride.

All those people!

He found himself shuddering. Zaefien glanced at him compassionately, as if she knew why. She knew so many things without being told.

*Impiously they detained
the dying, even against
their will;*

*They gave death to the
sound who were meant to
live.*

Nyark the wayward

Nyark the cruel,

Nyark the city of the Sorcerers.

Though only the younger historians could be heard, the Chief Historian, wrinkled as a tortoise, led the chant. He too wore the gray hood. His son's death would not be a surprise to him.

Death. The Sorcerers. The Historians. Yemm remem-

bered the previous Chief Historian, a man of richer memory and greater mind than this one, who had enlivened Yemm's boyhood with tales of the past. The Sorcerers he told Yemm, were preoccupied with death, terrified and fascinated by it. It played a decisive role in all their tales that had survived to the present. They had a whole tradition of stories about men and even women who killed others often with some justification, and who were patiently hunted down by natural and supernatural means and ritually murdered in cold blood under the auspices of the chief dignitaries. This was supposed to prevent further killings, but of course it hadn't.

Nyark the violent,

Nyark the vindictive

*Nyark the bloody City of
the Sorcerers.*

Their burial grounds were perpetually tabu for the plow or for food crops. The sight of human bones was a dreaded omen. If a man yielded to death in any way, if he let a hopeless invalid or a monstrous child die, if he killed himself or even allowed himself to die when he could prevent it the Sorcerers believed he had committed the most horrible of sins. Yet they killed each other all the time, for reasons nobody can understand now. They used a knife where a blow of the fist

should have satisfied them. They killed not only in anger, but for profit and for revenge and for ritual reasons and as a calculated measure of policy; and they were forever inventing perverse and gruesome ways of doing it. Most of their curiosity was directed toward the prolonging and taking of life. Even devices that should have been clean were sucked into the current of blood.

"They ate four-legged beasts," the old Chief Historian had explained to Yemm. "They had to slaughter household pets for food. Naturally this dwarfed their spirits. It is a violation of Harmony to eat flesh when there are fruit and fish at hand. The instincts are bound to sicken at it."

The old man had believed in the Sorcerers, Yemm realized now. Had anyone but Yemm known it? Had the old man warned Yemm never to mention their talks, or was it just that Yemm had feared laughter at his part in them? Certainly no one had laughed at the Chief Historian.

If Barr could only have known him—

Where was Barr? It was impossible to make out faces in the shifting, deceptive shadows.

How rapt they all were! The firelight flickered deliriously in dark eyes. The fisherman at his left didn't even realize that the captain of the

missing ship was home. Only Ton's wife and Zaefien had noticed him. The force of his own words to Ton struck him: these people whom neither wine nor holiday could unsettle much were drunk with visions of the doomed city.

*They built their towns into
the clouds.*

*They sent mirages into
their neighbors' houses,
And winged voices through
their skies.*

*Nyark the many-colored,
Nyark the many-tongued,
Nyark the many-skilled
City of the Sorcerers.*

For an instant, his mind dissolved the silhouettes of palm fronds and encircled the normal brown people of Aezaeliet with the gigantic stone edifices and angular man-made rainbows of Nyark. The firelight was a dancing company of the bright-haired ancestors of the Sunset People, and the stars were their high lighted windows.

Pressure on his arm roused him shuddering.

Yemm realized his head was drooping and his voice growing drowsy. Zaefien and he exchanged glances. They rose and made their way softly out of the crowd, up the slope, and along the level road toward the point where their little house stood overlooking the sea. Yemm found himself stumbling from exhaustion.

Nothing except his own hammock seemed important any more.

At last they reached the basketweave fence with the giant leaves of eddo and ginger along its base. Inside it Yemm smelled the herb-like pungence of bruised tomato plants and the sweetness of flowering tobacco; and then the warm mingled fragrance that meant home. Zaefien tugged gently at his arm, telling him to sit down on the stone floor in the doorway. He leaned gratefully against the wooden doorpost. Because of the holy day, no lamp was burning, and the starlight was too dim for him to see inside the house; but he heard her unroll his hammock and tie it in place. She must have been hoping for his return in spite of the mourning. He heard her spread several lengths of cloth in the hammock, since the night was cool. He heard her pierce a coconut for him and set it in the wooden fruit bowl on the shelf beside the hammock. Her straw sandals rustled on the stone floor. Then she stood beside him and touched his arm again.

The hammock accommodated itself to his weight and the covers nestled around him. A salt breeze filtered through the basketweave walls, but it brought land odors to him. Over in the amphitheatre, the people were reciting the *Sayings of the*

Remembered Dead. The chant and the surf mingled pleasantly with the palms' rustling. Zaefien drew up a chair beside his hammock and rested her cheek against his arm. She was crying softly. He was stroking her hair when he fell asleep.

He woke in the late afternoon. The fragrance of the mildly aphrodisiac Festival Tea was in the air. Somewhere down the road, children were playing gourds and reeds and three-toned hand drums and singing, improvising verses to the *Dolphin Song*. Farther away heavier drums and more mature voices sang the latest gossip. Young people were chattering and splashing at the end of the point, and now and then the young men's laughter rose big and full and care-free.

The wooden bowl was full of fruit now. He passed over the citrus fruit—Zaefien couldn't know that the whole crew had lived on just that for days—and bit into a fine tomato.

When he was done, the bowl was half empty. He rinsed the seeds and sorted them onto the drying shelf and carried the scraps out to the compost pit. Whatever has thriven in life will enrich the soil when its time comes. Zaefien was nowhere in sight. She must have gone to borrow something for him to

wear. This faded tunic had gone unremarked among the gray robes by firelight but it would not be decent for Festival.

For a while he stood there looking through the basket-weave fence. Presently three children came skipping along the road, the boy thumping a hand drum, the two girls rattling shell castanets. They made a pretty sight. The girls wore skirts and shawls of orange and bougainvillea with birthday necklaces of shell and mother of pearl. The boy wore a dark green kilt with a necklace of mahogany medallions and red seeds.

The girl in bougainvillea stepped to the middle of the road and began to dance while the others kept time. With surprising skill she executed the intricate steps of a wedding dance, but her little body, too young to understand the coquetry, could only describe the exuberance of a healthy child. A young matron in yellow joined them, laughing and clapping the rhythm.

Aezaeliet was a good place.

When Zaefien returned they would go for a swim. Then, dressed and refreshed, they could find the girls and their families. Yemm wanted badly to see Barr, even though he couldn't tell the history of the voyage until after the official Ship's Welcoming.

The history of the voyage.

They would visit Ton this evening. Yemm was not much worried about him now. Ton was one of those plants that sicken when they are uprooted and revive again in congenial soil. In fact, Ton drew a strength from his native land that Yemm, much as he loved it, had never found there.

From the pouch at his belt he took the gift he had brought Zaefien for her anniversary necklace. It was a little oval painting of a woman on fine-grained artificial stone. The face was the color of skim milk, with a faint flush at cheek and lip; the hair was dust-brown and elaborately arranged; the mouth and nose were improbably small. The gray-blue eyes, though, looked only too real: they gazed past one with such gentle, secret despair that with her shadowy smile they suggested the quiet kind of madness. The pallid light in the picture made it a fragment of the Cold Country: he half-expected it to melt in this sun. Was it wrong in Aezaeliet?

He had brought one other portrait and that had disturbed him from the first. He looked at it now, a small, marvelously true figure of a dying man, the length of his thumb, carved from something like whale's tooth. Yemm recalled the way Caen the cameo-maker had cradled it in his good hand. There

was such tender care in the workmanship, such agony and pity in the face, that whenever he looked at it Yemm was moved and shocked anew. He half-expected the uncanny thing to stir with the last fluttering of an ancient magic, or even to speak. It seemed to want to, so fiercely.

He was sure it meant something. What kind of artist would conjure up a dying man so lovingly? Were all the people of his race so strained and gaunt and sorrowful, or only this one? Was this figure the most terrible of all blasphemies, a foretelling of what should have been unknown, the end of an entire people?

Yemm saw again the Cold Country and the acres and acres of ruined stone houses, shaken apart like so many sand sculptures. The smallest were as high as six houses of Aezaeliet, yet a shattered length across the crushed bodies of house after house after house. He saw again the great orange bird-shaped things that crumbled into gritty pieces when the apprentice tried to climb on them.

Barr would want to hear about that. So would the others, whatever Ton said. They would want to hear about the stone jaguar with a full head of hair like a woman, and the network of underground caves, and the vast crater lake where nothing lived. Tradition

might prompt them feebly to laugh. The tradition that would prompt them to believe had older, stronger roots.

However they had died, in life the Sorcerers had done what all men want to do. Once Aezaeliet knew they had really lived, they would still condemn the Sorcerers, but the farmers would want to grow better crops on less land, and the divers would want to stay underwater for hours, and the women would want to bear their children without pain. And Barr would want to fly. The measured serenity of Aezaeliet might disintegrate, little by little.

Would Aezaeliet take up the ancient vices? Would quarrels end in killing? Would maimed men be patched together for living death? Would mothers strike their children and sons challenge their fathers? Would the drunken revels of the Festival of Beginnings prolong themselves through the once-sober year? Would neighbors each demand more than their share and more than their need, and fight and fight and cheat and lie to get it? Would their own magic devices rebel, and trick, and devour them?

Or were his people too sound and too wise, and too well warned by history, to adopt the Sorcerers' follies with their arts?

The little girl was still

dancing, a child's step now; and the young people from the beach had joined the circle. They took turns improvising couplets. A youth slipped off his sandals and used them to clap the heavy beat. Another took the little girl's hands and capered with her till she laughed helplessly.

His plump neighbor from across the road appeared in her gateway in a festival gown of dark red edged with purple. She chided the merry makers indulgently about something and led them down the road a little way, where she joined her rich low voice to the singing. He wondered what it meant. Was her father ill? Yemm hoped not: the old man was willful and witty and outspoken, taking full advantage of the privileges of age. Yemm had always found him delightful company.

The Sorcerers had dreaded old age.

Yemm wondered whether he would ever be completely of Aezaeliet again, now that he had seen the ruins of Nyark and recognized them, as if he had lived there. Barr would feel the same way about it. Yemm was determined to take Barr with him on the next trip, not to the ruins but to some nearer island on a regular trading voyage. Then, in time, when Yemm discovered a way to meet the dangers there, he

and Barr would see the ruins together.

Where was Zaefien? He turned and looked toward the road to town. Yesterday, at this hour, Ton had been insisting that the Eternal Harmony would never let them come home.

There she was. But still in gray, and hooded! Did she think he was a ghost? Not Zaefien—

The frigid white skyspray of the Cold Country seemed to settle around his heart, smothering it. Over her arm, she carried a folded length of gray cloth. He held his breath as he watched her come. She seemed to move too fast and too slowly. When she entered the gate and saw him standing there, she held out the mourning garment to him. They stared at each other in shocked understanding.

"Who was it?" he whispered. His first words since his return.

"I thought you knew. You were so grave last night. It was—Barr."

He was on his knees, his face buried in his hands. He couldn't answer. The "No!" that swelled in him was too big for his voice. On this trip he had watched three young friends die, and each time he had bowed his head and forced himself to acknowledge that it was time. But how could it be time for Barr? How could the Eternal

Harmony say that it was time for a sturdy boy before it was time for his grandfather? Must a man outlive his own descendants? Was that harmony?

Zaefien stroked the back of his neck until the first paroxysm of grief had passed and he sat up. Then she told him, "They'll postpone the Ship's Welcome for you until you're ready. Or if you'd like to ask Ton—"

"What happened, Zaefien?" he begged.

She sighed. "You know how he was, Yemm. He believed all the old fables. One day he swore he would prove they were true. People had already begun laughing at him a little but it got worse after that. One day he went swimming and just—kept on—"

Out of Yemm's own childhood, the helpless bitterness and the trapped rage came back, and he drowned with Barr. "Couldn't any of you have helped him?" he demanded.

"We tried to tell him, Yemm." Her eyes were frightened. "But he was too old for that. A boy old enough to go to sea, and talking about finding a way to fly or going looking for the place of the Sorcerers."

"Was that so terrible?" he asked coldly.

"Yemm..."

From his belt pouch he took the little portrait he had

brought her and held it out. Zaefien drew back in horror.

"She looks like something that shouldn't be! Where did you get it?"

He smiled cruelly. "A Sorcerer painted it. One of those devils you've been warned against since childhood, that did such wicked things without ever existing, but would have stopped short of letting fools murder their children."

He threw it at her feet and took the mourning garment and wrapped himself in it and drew the hood low over his face.

"Yemm—"

"I'll tell you about it when I get back. Enjoy the Festival, Zaefien."

He stalked out the gate. Down the road, the child in the bougainvillea dress was dancing still and the people around her still sang and clapped and played. It was no longer beautiful and it no longer had anything whatever to do with him. The neighbor who had drawn them away from the house of mourning led the song, tactfully ignoring him. Because he wore gray, he need not speak to anyone unless he wished. So considerate, the people of Aezaeliet!

It was Ton who found him three days later, out on the rocks where Yemm and Barr had talked about flying. Found him? They had probably watched him at a dis-

tance all along, and sent Ton to him. Aezaeliet offers few hiding places. At any rate, they knew he wasn't mad. He had remembered at last to eat, and had buried the scraps.

Ton looked well. In the long run, it was only the tender, home-loving member of the crew who had survived unscarred. His flesh was filling out again, his eyes were serene, and his only concern was for his captain. He came out to the edge of the cliff where Yemm sat watching the sea and Yemm smoothed a place for him in the grass.

"I'm all right, Ton," he said quietly. "I'm going back. Did they hold the Ship's Welcome?"

"Without you?" He had shocked Ton again. "They understand, Yemm."

"You didn't tell them anything!"

"Of course not. You're my captain."

"Tell them to hold it tonight. I'll be there."

"Are you...do you intend..."

Yemm stood up. "I have to tell them now. They have to know what they've done."

Ton rose too and faced him. "Yemm, if we'd arrived a few hours later, they would have recited sayings of yours at the Remembrance ceremony. That must mean something to you, no matter what's happened. To be among the Remembered Dead, to teach children you couldn't hope to see in your own lifetime. The

Chief Historian says it's the first time a man's sayings were collected while he still lived. You've always wanted to be more than a man, Yemm! Let the rest go, everything that's beyond mending, and keep the privilege you've earned. It cost you something!"

Yemm stared at him unseeingly. "They knew it would kill him. They killed him for being right, Ton. They killed him for guessing the truth. The last man who knew it was true about the Sorcerers they made a chief historian, because he also knew they liked equivocations and evasions. But Barr spoke out, because he was young and unsubtle, and they killed him."

"Yemm, could you live in a land ruled by witches? None of us could! We in Aezaeliet prize our freedom from superstition both for itself and because all our freedom depends on it. 'Superstition is the wind that drives the tyrants' war canoes.' Barr was old enough to influence the younger children. They only wanted to correct him and preserve our freedom."

"But he was right."

"Was he? Yemm, if every word in the *Doom of the Sorcerers* were true, it would still be superstition to try to resurrect their world. If it was ever real, it isn't now."

"You remember the old Chief Historian, Ton. No. He died before you were born. I

remember he told me once, 'We live on an island. They lived in a universe. Theirs was too big for them to understand, but sometimes I think ours is too small.'

"The Sorcerers couldn't accept human limits," Ton began. Then, measuring his words by Yemm's face, he changed his tack. "Yemm, we don't even know that those ruins were Nyark. A people can build great towers without being able to send out mirages from them. And all that stone... If the Sorcerers were so restless, why would they build in anything so permanent? How many worlds may there have been before ours?"

"Stop humoring me, Ton! The Sorcerers weren't as simple as we try to make them. That's all. There are no simple people, are there? Here in Aezaeliet, do we expect each other to be all alike? Or all one way all the time, all our lives? Then how could the Sorcerers, with their chaos of arts and experiences, be simple? Couldn't they have dreamed of permanence? They were dreamers, weren't they?"

"All the more reason to be wary of them. Yemm, please think..."

Yemm drew himself up. He knew what he intended to do, but his three-day ordeal, on top of that voyage, had left him little strength for arguments. "As your captain, I or-

der you to announce the Ship's Homecoming."

All expression left Ton's face. "Yes, captain," he answered as if Yemm had given a commonplace order at sea. He rose and walked down the slope to the main road. Yemm frowned after him.

When Yemm stepped out before the assembly in the amphitheatre and looked down into the loved, familiar, normal brown faces of friends and relatives and fellow islanders, his rage had worn itself out. What they had done, they had done in error. They had been trying to preserve the truth, without themselves knowing what it was. He couldn't hate them, but they had to be told.

For a giddy moment he saw them as a diver sees the ocean gardens when the water is troubled. They vanished entirely, then waveringly formed again. Once more he pictured them, horribly precise, surrounded by the angular man-made stalagmites where the Sorcerers had lived. In the momentary hallucination their faces were gaunt as the man's in the whale's-tooth carving or feeble and worm-pale as the woman's in the tiny painting.

The dizziness passed. These were after all sober people, as incapable of the Sorcerers' excesses as of imagining the Sorcerer's infinitely complicated universe. All they would learn, all they needed to know,

was that the venturesome and curious had a right to live.

"Kinsmen." It was hard to face them, hard to call up the right words. "Ordinarily we come to you with news about the citrus crops in the Greater Islands or hurricane damage in Tiniek. This time the news is momentous. The Eternal Harmony has seen fit to renew our ancient wisdom. In our impiety, we have come to doubt that the City of the Sorcerers, birthplace of our most sacred traditions, ever really existed." They were smiling uncomfortably. His body tightened, and with it his voice. "We were wrong! The storm that rose soon after we left the Greater Islands carried us to the very ruins of Nyark."

The tittering started like the wind in the palms before rain. Then it was like the first drops, and then a shower. The sound was more merciful and more affectionate than it had been in his childhood. They had respected him for a long time. But it was laughter.

"Listen to me!" His voice rose, and the laughter drowned it in a belly-chilling downpour like the rains of the Cold Country.

Yemm bowed his head. The whips of the Sorcerers would have been kinder.

"My captain is tired and ill," he heard Ton rebuke them.

"We've suffered from hunger and thirst and storm and sun, so that only we two are left alive. There were mirages on the sea, and the air of the North raises fevers. My captain is the only one in the islands who could have brought a ship home from that voyage. And when we came home at last, my captain found it had been time for his beloved grandson. Is it fitting to laugh at a man who has been wise, and who is unsettled by grief and famine and weariness?"

They quieted and lowered their gaze.

Yemm seemed to wake out of delirium. "Thank you, Ton," he murmured, drawing his hand across his eyes. What had he been doing!

"We've been like the two hands of one man," Ton answered softly. "I couldn't let this happen."

Yemm gathered his strength and lifted his voice. "It was a hard voyage, that took three of a crew of five men. Let Ton recount it."

Then Zaefien was leading him out of the amphitheatre. And what had he seen, after all, to make him believe he saw Nyark? Stone ruins like a crushed hive. Faded portraits. What strange things hunger and sun can do to a man's senses!

Hunger and sun and a preposterous old legend....

WATCH FOR THOMAS N. SCORTIA'S UNUSUAL
"INSANE PLANET"—NEXT MONTH!

sepp of sixen

by KAREN KUYKENDALL

His hand was thin and milky white, encrusted with jewels, his nails tipped with blue lacquer. This was the ruler.

PAUL MARTINE looked forward to his first Sunday in Amador-am-Lech. He looked forward, despite the fact that the little church to which he had been assigned was noticeably in a decayed condition: it had, as the townsfolk would say, 'atmosphere.' After all, it had been built during the latter 20th Century, when the great wars had ended.

Paul inspected his new surroundings rather generally. Located in a geologically young valley surrounded by rugged snowy peaks, Amador presented a crisp, clean, exhilarating atmosphere. Most of the private homes and apartments clustered on the river's edge had been stylish during the middle 20th Century, replacing still older dwellings which had been destroyed during the course of the great wars. The business district was light, airy, up-to-date; enhanced by shady trees and sidewalk cafes. Amador's sturdy industrious people were well-dressed and well-fed. They seemed happy and content: they rode in sleek little cars, visited the theaters and parks, worked tirelessly, played joy-

In addition to being an enthusiastic reader of SF, Egyptian archaeology, and sociological books, Karen Kuykendall, a professional artist, works in the family business in Tucson, doing decorative panels in medieval, Minoan, Egyptian and other styles, and designing decorative accessories.

ously. There were no slums, no signs of chronic ill-health or poverty.

High above the town, aloof from the humdrum life of the city below, the Sky Palace seemed a continuation of the sheer granite cliffs. This hoary, well-fortified edifice, with its incredibly magnificent view, was the traditional home of the rulers of Amador-am-Lech, and was the one structure which had survived best the ravages of man and time.

Paul regretted that he did not have time to contact more of his new parishoners personally before Sunday. He had only arrived two days before—and his sermon was only partly finished. His hopes were high as he set about his task of getting the church in as respectable a condition as possible in the short time left.

COLORFUL spectrums of light from the three unbroken stained glass windows played upon the now-straightened pews. The altar, repaired so that it would not collapse, glistened with a pair of golden candelabra Paul had brought with him; and a thick copy of the Lord's Book rested between them. The floor was swept clean of dirt and debris. Unseen spiders continued to enjoy the sanctified safety of their shadowy homes in the caves, while below an occasional rodent scampered across the unfami-

liarily clean floor in quest of tidbits. The ancient organ was beyond repair. But it would scarcely be worth the effort to remove it, as there was no replacement.

Paul surveyed the results of his labor with pride. Dressed in his best clerical toga and coronet, he mounted the narrow steps to the belfry, siezed the chain, and rang the bell.

Fifteen minutes passed. A half-hour lengthened into an hour, then to two hours. Paul sighed. Why did they not come to church? Surely they knew of him—he had certainly talked to enough of the populace to get the word spread around. And he had been advertised on Video-screen. They had seemed friendly—but why did they not come?

'IT WAS most unwise to attempt reopening that old church,' Jan told him. Lean, angular Jan was one of the many master craftsmen of Amador-am-Lech. His specialty was glass and ceramic products—mosaics, stained glass, blown glass, and tiles.

'You'll only get yourself into trouble if you persist,' burly Arno declared emphatically. Arno operated the largest motor vehicle showroom and service-station in town.

'Just mind your own business and you'll not get hurt,' advised scrawny Lars, the

Chief Photographer of Amador-am-Lech.

'You should leave this town while you can, because some people might get the wrong ideas.' This informant was Lilo, the plump, pink teacher of history at the University.

Wherever he went, Paul was given the same advice. The people wanted to go to church—they spoke of this desire in guarded tones—but they were afraid. Afraid, not as much for their physical life as for their economic life: going to church in Amador could result in a permanent loss of livelihood there. As he interviewed more people, Paul made mental notes of what he was told.

Amador-am-Lech was ruled by an autocratic dictator, His Excellency the Baron Sepp of Sixen. The Baron's power was absolute; his will alone could decree life or death for each and every inhabitant. He owned all the major industries of Amador, which were administered by his picked agents; he owned all the media of advertising and communication, all the transportation facilities, even every house and building in town and the very land beneath. No new building could be erected, no old one destroyed, without the Baron's approval. The subjects taught in the schools were those he deemed necessary. His police maintained a constant vigilance to see that his will was obeyed.

The people did not altogether resent their imperious ruler, for his able administration had brought prosperity from ruin, created new vocational opportunities, and stimulated interest in the arts. His aid could be counted upon in times of disaster; nor was he adverse to helping an individual in need. He did not practice wanton terror, but those who displeased him had ways of disappearing completely and permanently.

Yet there was no evidence that the Baron Sepp wished to be worshipped as a god. There was no evidence that he was actually against the established religion. His power had certainly succeeded in keeping people away from church, though there was no evidence of his persecuting people for practicing religious beliefs in their own homes. Perhaps he considered home more sacred than church.

The mystery was heightened by the fact that no one had ever actually seen the Baron Sepp of Sixen. Occasionally His Excellency would descend from the lofty luxury of the Sky Palace in a fine black-and-silver limousine escorted by a host of black-and-silver supercycles, and be driven past the awed populace to inspect all the new buildings and check the old ones. He never left the guarded privacy of his vehicle. Had any of the lesser be-

ings been able to peer into his limousine, however, they would have seen nothing, for His Excellency was always heavily veiled.

'THAT SETTLES that,' said Paul with finality. 'I'm going to pay a little social call to the Sky Palace.'

'Don't,' warned Jan. 'You might not come back. I would not like to lose a good friend.'

'I've got to. It seems that someone ought to talk to him. At least find out why—'

'One does not question His Excellency the Baron Sepp of Sixen. If one does not like his decree, one must make the best of it. To cross Sepp of Sixen is to play with fire.'

Jan had full knowledge of this. Once when he was commissioned to design, manufacture, and install three walls of mosaic and stained glass for the Baron's private chambers, he remarked that Sepp had no appreciation for beauty since he could not see it. Sepp ordered him flogged—but waited until after the job was completed. 'And he did pay for it,' Jan added. 'Paid well, too.'

Paul dispatched a letter to the Sky Palace, requesting an interview with Sepp of Sixen. The interview was granted.

He was left to wait in the spacious ante-room while his escort vanished to inform Sepp of his arrival. This was merely a formality, for with the aid of a videoscreen the

Baron could see anywhere in the palace.

In the meantime, the young minister examined his surroundings. The large, massive but simply-designed pieces of furniture, the subtle earthen colorings of the fine draperies, carpets, and textured walls were manifestations of His Excellency's impeccable taste. His eye for beauty was obviously highly developed, to judge from the blown glass and case of richly-bound books.

The large rectangular mirror caught Paul's eye: it had been a long time since he had really looked at himself. The reflection was of a tall, muscular young man, whose gilt-edged chartreuse toga offset the warm bronze of his flesh. His face was not especially handsome, but it was sufficiently creased to denote Character. His black hair was bound in a little topknot—the badge of his profession.

The escort returned and bade Paul to follow him.

PAUL'S EYES adjusted to the dimly-lit room. Part of one wall was occupied by the electronic videoscreen, the rest of it by an impressive stone and colored glass mural. Rich brocades and silks adorned two other walls and flowed to the floor; when the curtains of the fourth were drawn, a panoramic view of the valley was revealed. Upon a massive wooden chest a translucent glass bowl glit-

tered dimly; in a far corner sat a large ceramic cat, its paws concealed by the lush carpet. Paul focused his gaze upon the upraised dais near a silken wall, which he could now see quite clearly in the twilight. Reclining with languid ease upon a richly-draped couch, was the Baron Sepp of Sixen.

Though the Baron's little body was completely swathed in luxuriously flowing yards of a pale chiffon-like fabric, Paul could plainly see that his form was slender and graceful. A thin, milky-white hand, encrusted with jewels and tipped with long blue lacquered nails, was slightly visible beneath the folds of gauze. It was a hand which had never known physical labor.

'I have been expecting you.' The voice from the veiled face was soft and low.

Paul approached the dais to gain a closer look.

'Stay where you are,' commanded the Baron, shifting his body beneath its wrappings. 'I may appear to be alone, but I assure you I am not. I am never alone.'

Paul saw no one, but decided Sepp knew best.

'You had a lot of nerve—calling upon lesser creatures before coming to me. I do not like that.'

'I think it perfectly logical that I meet my prospective congregation first,' Paul replied, annoyed. 'After all,

they're the backbone of any church.'

'That's what they all say,' growled Sepp in disgust.

'They—'

'The other ministers. There were eight before you came. Not a one thought to pay me even a courtesy call before contacting the villagers. They chose to wait, as did you.'

'I'm sorry if I've offended Your Excellency, but—'

'I am the ruler of this town! I am the Supreme Power here. Without my Will, without my money, nothing at all would ever be done. But do you people ever think of that? Oh, no. I am only thought of when you want an explanation of why no one appeared in church.'

'From what I hear, Your Excellency lives such a secluded life that it's only natural that a newcomer such as I would be unaware of your presence.'

'That is no excuse!'

'I did not come here to argue the point. I should like an explanation of why you are against people attending church.'

'I thought so,' sighed Sepp. 'You are no different from the others.'

'Well?'

'I say unto you the same as I said unto them: I simply do not think that going to church is necessary.'

'Not necessary? How can Your Excellency believe such a thing?'

'Very easily. I feel that the time spent in church can be diverted to more productive means, such as the building of new schools, housing and hospitals. The people have enough time for recreation.'

'I do not consider going to church a recreation, Your Excellency.'

'Anything that does not aid one in making a living, that is done strictly for pleasure, is a recreation.'

'But to worship in church elevates the spirit, and makes for a happier, more content people, who will not shirk their work.'

'If they wish to worship, let them do it at home. Church-going consumes too much valuable time.'

'I have been told that Your Excellency is well learned in psychology. Surely you must realize that the very physical properties of a church building is more conducive to the elevating of one's spiritual nature. 'To worship in God's house—'

'When the people are well provided for, then the spirit is content. For does not God permeate all homes?'

'It is obvious that you are well provided for, Your Excellency, but is your spirit content? Has God permeated your home?'

'How dare you put such a query to me!'

'Well?'

'Of course my spirit is content. Most content.'

Visibly annoyed, Sepp reached for his ebony cane, arose from his couch and descended to Paul's level, carefully picking his way so as not to trip over his flowing swathings. His feline grace was marred by a noticeable limp. His vision must be acute, if finding his way to the curtains in the twilight was any measure of it. With an imperious gesture, he drew back the curtains and stood with his small, fragile body silhouetted in the sunlight. 'Magnificent, is it not?' he said, referring to the view.

'You have ignored my question.'

'There are some questions not worthy of answering.'

Sepp turned and faced Paul, his veiled head held proudly. 'I shall tell you something, Paul Martine,' he said, 'I shall tell you that I shall not permit any money to be spent on that church, or on any church, for that matter.'

'If I learn that money is being collected for religious purposes, I shall raise the taxes and use the revenue for more worthwhile projects. If people wish to worship in their own homes, that is their business. But religion loses its glamor when it is not conducted in a building designed for that purpose. You, Paul Martine, will have to eat. To eat costs money, which means you will have to be paid. Money paid you by the cap-aga-

tion comes from me in a round-about way, and paying preachers is disgusting to me.'

'May I ask why you feel this way?'

'I do not like some talkative oaf telling me what to believe. Organized religion is for the unthinking masses. I am above the masses. I believe as I please.'

'Then your concern is not entirely monetary.'

'That is quite true. However, I shall not endeavor to persecute followers of the organized religion, unless they seek to collect money or unless they instigate an insurrection against me.'

'Violence is frowned upon, Your Excellency.'

'I am giving you warning. I am also giving you advice to leave. I have no desire for your kind to remain here, for even if you took another job, you would find it difficult to resist occasional preaching. I am the ruler here. I bow my head to no one, except to the Power which created me. I will not tolerate the masses bowing to the word of a preacher, when they owe the honors to me.'

'Your Excellency, I am not leaving. I came here to do a duty, and I shall fulfill it with or without your sanction.'

'The others made similar remarks. Where are they now? Dead, or exiled. I saw to that. You will join them, I assure you.'

'I accept the challenge, Your Excellency.' Paul bowed respectfully. 'I'll see you in church.'

'YOU ACTUALLY saw him?' Arno inquired.

'That I did,' replied Paul. 'We had quite a talk.'

'Did he say why he does not want a church?' Jan asked.

'He does not think it necessary.'

'Not necessary? How does he figure that?'

'He believes schools, hospitals, factories, etc. are more important. Granted, they are fine—but I believe his motive in supporting them is because they reflect the personal glory of Sepp of Sixen instead of that of an unseen Spirit.'

'Is that the only reason he does not want a church—because he thinks it unnecessary?'

'No, Jan, it isn't. He does not approve of a minister telling him, as he put it, what to believe. Religion is for the unthinking masses, he said, and he considers himself above and beyond the masses.'

'Well, the little snob!'

'No wonder he does not mingle with us peasants. We're not good enough for him!' Arno snorted with disgust.

The teacher of History spoke up. 'Did you see the Baron's face, Paul? I'll bet he's old and ugly.'

'I saw no more than what

Jan saw, Lilo. As you know, he is quite small, fragile, and lame.'

'Then—he was veiled?' Lilo was disappointed. 'Did you ask him why he wears it? What's he hiding, anyway?'

'I did not ask because I believe that is his own personal business, and that if he wanted to tell me, he would have done so.'

'You didn't even try to remove it?'

'I respect his person. Besides, we were not alone. I could see no others in that room, but I could sense their presence.'

'So you know no more about him than we do.'

'Only this: He is very lonely.'

'Sepp lonely? With all that he has?'

'Money and power can't bring the companionship of friends, Lilo. Sepp only issues orders to people. I doubt if he has anyone with whom to talk things over, in whom to confide.'

'He probably has no desire for friends,' Jan said. 'People like Sepp are interested only in the submissiveness of vassals, not the companionship of equals.'

'And I don't pity him,' Arno declared, 'especially since he's ordered the church razed.'

'When did you hear that?' Paul asked.

'One of his agents dropped in to pick up his car. He just

mentioned it in passing, and later I drove by to see if the work had started. It had.'

Paul thought.

'I have an idea,' he said finally. 'But to carry it out, I'll need all the help I can get.'

'What is it?' Lilo leaned forward expectantly.

'We must kidnap Sepp.'

'Are you mad, Paul? Why—'

'It's the only thing we can do now.'

'I don't understand. To kidnap Sepp is dangerous—and what good could come of it?'

'Tell me, Arno, are you loyal to Sepp?'

'I—I guess so. He's never done anything to my detriment; in fact, he's been good for my business.'

'You, Lilo?'

'His suggestions—or orders, I should say, have been quite beneficial to the school system. I don't like his dictatorial manner, but I won't hold that against him.'

'And you, Jan?'

'He flogged me, and I haven't forgotten it. But he has given me most of my very best jobs, and at times when I needed the work. Yes, I would defend him.'

'Then this is my plan: We must convince Sepp that the people of Amador are loyal to him not merely because of any fear or awe of his power. If we can prove to him that we want him with us because we enjoy the company of him—'

self as a person, then we will have scored a victory.'

'But—will it work?'

'I don't know, Jan. I can only pray it will. You know, to be needed and wanted is a basic human emotion, just as important today as it was centuries ago. Sepp may feel his presence isn't really necessary after all, and therefore seeks to make us aware of his power so that we will be dependent upon him.'

'But how do you propose to abduct him?' Arno asked. 'He is always heavily guarded.'

'He will undoubtedly descend from his exalted heights to inspect, from the seclusion of his limousine, the razing of the church. We should arrange to have a group of people in the vicinity every day, to mingle with the passers-by, to be vigilant and prepared to seize the Baron the moment his car slows down. The supercyclists' attention will have to be diverted so that the abduction can be carried out.'

'Electron bombs would be a good diverting element,' Arno said. 'They're harmless, but they sting painfully when they explode.'

'Can you get some?'

'I think so.'

'We will need at least a dozen more men,' Paul said. 'Men who are ordinary-looking so that they will not stand out in a crowd; men who are strong and quick and who are in sympathy with our cause.'

Names were listed, people to be contacted, investigated, and certified as trustworthy. All knew that more than the future of a church and the right to worship there was at stake. If they failed, they could be charged with instigating an insurrection and executed. Planning, therefore, would have to be thorough.

'Above all, no harm must befall Sepp of Sexen,' Paul emphasized. 'We cannot expect to gain his confidence if he is frightened half to death. His person must not be violated in any way.'

'Where are we to take him, if and when we capture him?' Jan inquired.

'How about the old warehouse cellar by the river?' suggested Arno.

'Hardly an inspiring place for one of Sepp's type,' Jan replied.

'Well, why not my house? It's nice and homey, and no one'd ever dream of looking there, I'm sure.' Lilo described the virtues of her home, emphasizing that its secluded atmosphere would appeal to Sepp's love of privacy.

'What do you think?' Paul asked of Jan and Arno.

'Her place would be perfect,' they replied.

THE ABDUCTION was successful. The supercyclists had been sufficiently confused to leave their master unprotected for a few brief moments—time enough for Arno

to pull open the car door and seize its startled occupant. Sepp had struggled violently, but in his imprisoning swathings his meager strength was no match for the massive Arno.

Now, in the quieter atmosphere of Lilo's home, Sepp sat uneasily upon the couch where Arno had none too gently thrown him. Nervously he sought to rearrange the flowing chiffon swathings while a dozen pairs of eyes watched him intently. His dignity had suffered from such coarse treatment, and His Excellency was uncertain as to how to cope with it. The unpleasant knowledge that he was alone among strangers did not help matters at all.

'Well done!' exclaimed Paul, surveying the results with obvious satisfaction. 'We aren't apt to be discovered here for a long, long while, if at all.'

'Yes,' said Jan, 'and now let's see what our distinguished guest looks like.'

He strode rapidly toward the shrouded figure on the couch. Other voices joined in excited tones as their owners crowded for a closer look.

'Hold it,' Paul commanded, stepping between Jan and the unhappy Sepp. 'Remember what I asked of you—our guest's person is not to be violated in any way.'

'But we just want to see what he looks like, Paul,'

complained Lilo. 'Aren't you a little curious?'

'I admit I am,' Paul replied. He turned, looked upon the little swathed figure. 'Sepp must feel that we are his friends, that we mean him no harm. When—and if—he chooses to reveal his face to us, he must be allowed to do so of his own free will.'

The Baron was both surprised and relieved. His veiled eyes returned Paul's gaze with a mixed feeling of respect and distrust.

The first move would be to put Sepp at ease, to get him to talk. Lilo invited everyone to sit down and make themselves comfortable, while she prepared the coffee and cakes.

'You've done a great deal for this town, Your Excellency,' Arno said. 'Like that new amphitheater. We've needed one for a long time.'

'How true!' said Jan. 'Now we can offer those folks in Mintz a real challenge in architecture as well as in sports.'

Sepp stiffened, suspicious.

The general tone of conversation was directed from the amphitheater to sports in general. I like skiing best. So stimulating! Fishing's my favorite. You call that sport? Ha, that's my job. I prefer chess. How about you, Sepp? What do you like to do? I—I don't indulge in sports, unless you call riding horseback a sport. Hear that? Sepp rides horseback. You ought to go with me sometime—I can show

you some of the most spectacular scenery ever. Cool waterfalls, plunging chasms! Where do you ride, Sepp? Up into the hills, to the foot of the glacier. Sounds wonderful! I'd like to go up there sometime.

Conversation continued in this manner, but Sepp was still guarded. Lilo passed out refreshments, which the little Baron politely refused, as she knew he would.

Paul quietly observed Sepp and those who sought to engage him in conversation. The Baron's uneasiness in this unfamiliar situation showed no signs of vanishing. Paul approached him, casually drew up a chair between Jan and Lars.

'More cake, Paul?' Lilo's plump hand held out the half-filled plate.

'Don't mind if I do. It's superb.'

'Anyone else?'

'Not yet. Just put it over here.'

Between bites of cake and sips of coffee, Paul became aware that Sepp was watching him in particular.

'You did not bring me here to engage in a lot of small talk,' the Baron said. 'You want something from me, and I know well what it is.'

'No, Excellency. We're not asking you for anything. We just want to become acquainted with you, is all, and we had hoped that you would like to become acquainted.'

'You are not the kind of people with whom I care to associate. Now what are you going to do to me?'

'Your Excellency, we mean you no harm. Please believe us.'

'So? This is certainly a peculiar way to request favors, I must say.'

'We ask no favors. We are not trying to bribe you. We know you are far above bribery, and we respect and honor you for it.'

'But then, why—'

'Perhaps it's because we pity you.'

'Pity me? Ha! You should envy me!'

'No, Your Excellency. It is you who should envy us.'

'Indeed! I do not understand.'

'We have neither wealth nor power nor fame, Your Excellency, but we have the happiness and enrichment that only the companionship of one another can bring. We have pity for you because you have been excluded from any enjoyment of real happiness.'

'Well, of all the nerve—speaking to me in such a manner! Why should you care, anyway?'

'We care very much, Your Excellency.'

'Nonsense. All you care about is getting me to sanction the operation of your accursed church. This I shall not do.'

'It is quite true that we would like to have your ap-

proval, but we shall not force you to give it. You see, a church cannot function without people, and we would be honored to include Your Excellency as a member.'

'Of course you would! My presence alone would bring unlimited prestige.'

'Must you always remain above everything, Your Excellency? Have you never had a desire to belong to a group, to be a part of a group, just for the enjoyment of one another's company? Do you actually want to go through life alone?'

'I am never alone. My attendants see to it that I am well cared for, well protected. They regard it a major calamity should I even prick a finger; they worry should I sneeze. I am surrounded only by beauty. I am not allowed to want for a thing.'

'But can your attendants come to you to talk over any problems or ideas which they may have?'

'Certainly. My door is always open.'

'And can you discuss your problems and ideas with them?'

'Certainly not. That is none of their business.'

'But I'll bet there are many times when you want to. It must be a great mental strain to have to make all decisions yourself, lest your dignity be shattered in the eyes of your vassals should you stoop so low as to ask *their* opinion.'

Gradually calm settled over the proud little Baron. 'Yes, I am lonely,' he admitted with a sad sigh, 'but that is the price I must pay for my position.'

'You need not be lonely any longer, Excellency. There are many people in Amador—not just us, who would want to call you their friend, who would want to make you welcome in their homes. Your power, your influence, has nothing at all to do with it. It is in you as a person in whom we are interested.'

'I wish I could believe that,' Sepp replied.

'We speak truly.'

'You had me flogged once,' Jan said, 'but I suppose I asked for it. I hated you for that, but time—and good jobs—do heal old wounds. I can forgive you now. Will you accept my hand in friendship?'

Veiled eyes flickered uncertainly. A thin milky-white hand, encrusted with jewels gleaming dully beneath the web of chiffon, timidly touched Jan's calloused fingers, then quickly withdrew. Jan sighed. Sepp was still wary.

'Paul, it's getting late,' Lilo said. 'What are we going to do with Sepp now? Talking doesn't seem to have done any good at all.'

'We've failed, Paul.'

'Yes, Arno, that's what I fear. Well, there's only one thing left to do now.'

'You mean—kill him?'

'No. We can't do that. We'll simply have to release him.'

'Release Sepp? Endanger us all further? Do you realize that if he's let out of here alive he'll have us all executed on charges of revolt?'

'Then you insist on killing him, Arno?'

'I don't want to, but I see no other way.'

'Well, Sepp, what do you say? Will we be charged with starting an insurrection and executed, if we release you?'

'Of course he'll say no to save his skin,' growled Arno.

'I do not plead for my life,' replied the little Baron haughtily. 'Life, for me, has long since lost its meaning. If you killed me, I have but one request: that my face be not revealed.'

'You mean you are not afraid to die?'

'We all must go sometime. It is inevitable. I do not fear death, though I do not look forward to it. I fear only humiliation.'

'We all agree that Sepp has been a good ruler,' Paul said. 'His successor may not be. I suggest we should take a chance and release him.'

'I am inclined to agree,' said Arno hesitantly, 'even though I know it's dangerous to do so.'

More discussion followed. 'Get the car, Jan,' Paul said finally, 'we're taking His Excellency home.'

Sepp looked up in disbelief. 'You are actually releasing

me? But why? Don't you realize—'

'We do, Sepp. But we did not intend to hold you as a hostage in the first place. As we said before, we only wanted to talk to you.'

'But why did you have to abduct me to do it—if that is all you wanted?'

'You would not have permitted us in your palace for such a trivial request.'

'No. I guess I would not.'

'The car is ready,' Jan announced.

'Very well. Let us go.'

'My cane was lost when I was taken here,' Sepp said. 'I have difficulty in walking without it.'

Arno solved the situation with ease. He gathered Sepp in his brawny arms and carried him to the waiting car. Before the door was shut, Lilo pressed a small bag into Sepp's thin hand. 'It's all that remains of the cake,' she said. 'I do want you to have some. It's quite good. You'll like it!'

'I thank you,' Sepp murmured.

The car drove off into the night.

THE GLASS mural cast colorful spectrums of light upon the plush floor. Sepp of Sixen leaned lightly upon a golden cane, his proud veiled head lifted to meet Paul's gaze.

'I have done much thinking this past week,' he said. 'I could not bring myself to take

action against you. I have thought deeply about what transpired that evening.'

'And do you believe us?'

'Yes.'

Sepp turned away, looked abstractedly out the window. 'I've wanted people to want me for so long! To want *me*, not what comes with me. To be respected, to be appreciated, first as a Person and secondly as a Power. When you are a Power, you cannot have friends. You cannot afford to trust anyone. You are condemned to walk alone.'

'You need walk alone no longer, Excellency.'

'I realize that now. I only hope I am not too late.'

'It's never too late to make a new beginning, Your Excellency.'

Sepp was silent. Presently he spoke again, softly, gently: 'You and your friends have been most respectful of my person. You did not attempt to unveil me; you did not try to degrade or humiliate me. And you even freed me, despite the risk you felt. When that woman gave me the cake, I could have wept. No one ever before offered me anything without strings attached. I know she was not trying to impress me.'

'Lilo's too frank for that, Excellency. She and all the others are genuinely interested in you.'

'I want them to be my friends, too. Really. They seem to be very nice people,

even if they are of a plebeian status. But I can overlook that.'

Sepp moved closer to the window. The soft sunlight filtered in, casting a warm glow upon the luxurious carpet.

'For twenty years I have been secluded from the world,' Sepp murmured, partly to himself. 'People always frightened me when they sought to become too familiar. The constant pushing, the gawking, the rushing, the noise, was too much for me. I left living in the city long ago and retreated up here. I can think here. No longer need I be stared at by the prying eyes of the curious. I veiled myself against all such crudity. A lame man is a freak, you know, and I could not bear to be classified as an oddity of nature.'

'And do my friends frighten you, Excellency?'

'Not any more, Mr. Martine. They did not gawk at me or make lewd remarks; they behaved quietly and tastefully in my presence. It was I who behaved badly. I did not know how to reciprocate.'

Sepp lowered his head in a gesture of unaccustomed humility. Turning to face Paul once again, he lifted a frail hand and removed the veiling from his face. The fabric fell in luxuriant folds over his shoulder. His magnificent eyes looked up into Paul's, and he smiled gently. The alabaster whiteness of the face

the minister beheld was sculpted into sharp, aristocratic features enhanced by a trim bristly black mustache and close-cropped ebony hair. Sepp of Sixen could not have been more than forty years old—scarcely as old as Paul himself.

'I have purchased a fine new organ for the church,' Sepp announced unexpectedly, with ill-concealed pride.

'But I thought—'

'I have decreed that the church will not be razed after all. That is what you wanted, is it not?'

'Yes, of course—'

'You did not bribe me, Paul Martine. Rather you convinced me, and showed me what a fool I was.'

'Your Excellency—'

'My name is Sepp. It would please me if you called me that.'

'A pleasure, Sepp.'

'Now then, I have found a fine organist to play next Sunday; and Jan has been commissioned to repair—or replace—the windows. The repairs to the church itself are virtually complete.'

'May I ask why this change of heart, Sepp? Not that I am ungrateful—'

'Ah, so now you are the suspicious one, suspecting hidden strings. Well, you have done me a great service

by giving me a new outlook on life, so I merely wished to return the favor by repairing your church. I succumbed to your subtle preachings after all. Besides, the architecture of that church pleases me more each time I look at it.' Sepp smiled coyly.

'We can build a great church together,' Paul said. 'It has endless possibilities.'

'You said—we—'

'Let's make this a joint project, shall we?'

Sepp extended his thin hand, which Paul accepted. 'You, the ninth minister sent here, have succeeded where the others failed. I know when I am beaten. You have conquered me.'

'You have conquered yourself Sepp. I just helped you along, is all.'

'I should like to hold a celebration. Here, in my Palace. Would those friends of yours—I cannot recall all their names—come? You, too. I shall not be veiled. Not any more. Perhaps I shall even sit for a few photographs—and view the waterfalls and canyons from horseback.'

'You will begin to live now, Sepp. I look forward to escorting you to church next Sunday.'

Sepp of Sixen smiled. 'I will be there,' he said.

WATCH FOR STANLEY MULLEN'S DRAMATIC
"LAZARUS BELL" NEXT MONTH!

the cradle

by BRYCE WALTON

You never had it so good at Happy Day—until you tried to revolt against the regimentation and brain washing.

MONDAY morning he woke up two hours before the alarm told him to do so. And although he usually woke up prematurely and had been able to fake sleep by lying rigid with closed eyes, this morning he knew was the last time he would ever wake up as Eric McClinton.

This morning he couldn't fake sleep for two hours. Not even for two minutes. His bladder screamed a protest. He had to get up to go to the bathroom. His movement would activate the electronic beam. The apartment would come alive. The Company Personology Clinic would know he hadn't gotten his nine hours sleep.

That would be one more serious and final demerit on the debit side of his adjustment ledger.

Mr. Quell, his office manager, had smilingly pointed out yesterday that one more serious demerit and Eric would be sent to the Company Clinic to be tranquilized.

Eric shivered and groaned in silence, not daring to move, knowing he had to move. He lay like a brittle glass rod beside his happy wife. He felt her contented dreamless body

Missouri-born Bryce Walton, wartime correspondent for Leatherneck and writing fulltime ever since, has been all over the Pacific and is the author of hundreds of stories and novelets, including many of the Captain Vileco, TV serial, stories. Walton is also prominent in the SF field.

sleeping happily and the thought of her aroused such a helpless anguish of pity and imprisoned rage in him that for a second he almost forgot the pressure in his bladder.

Betty was somebody else now. She had been tranquilized clear up to here, and when he looked into her placid eyes he couldn't see anything familiar in them. He thought of old man Sloane who lived in the same wing of the *Happy-Day* Cereal Company's Housing Center, Wing 5. Old man Sloane had kicked up a fuss about having to eat *Happy-Day* cereal for breakfast every morning, and had thrown a bowl of *Happy-Day* Popover Crunchies through a picture window. Sloane had refused to go to work, had tried to lock himself in his apartment, but found that there were no locks on *Happy-Day* doors. Sloane came out of the Company Clinic smiling and serene. No more trouble with old man Sloane. Now he smiled all the time, never got demerits, and greeted everybody with one the Company slogans:

"You never had it so good."

Tranquility was a nice word. Who could sensibly squawk against such a thing? Who didn't want to be serene, adjusted, untroubled? If you weren't, you were expected to be only too eager to scurry into the *Happy-Day* Clinic and get a big shot of tranquility.

But Eric was horrified at the idea of walking into the Clinic and coming out a contented vegetable. For five months after signing up with the *Happy-Day* Company he suffered in silence, attempted to hide his delinquency, but he had acquired too many personality demerits.

Desperately he blinked once more at the clock. Its hands hardly seemed to have moved at all. The painful pressure was intolerable. He could think of only one offense worse than not getting nine hours sleep, and that was to be guilty of doing what even babies no longer did in bed at *Happy-Day*.

He crawled out of bed, his nerves spasming as the movement exploded the apartment into wide-awakeness. Radiant heat warmed the room instantly. Lights blinked on. The Company teevee screen flung a *Happy-Day* family into the room as they sat around their kitchen table having breakfast, commenting on their tasty variety of cereal, and having a Communal Sing.

"Is everybody happy," an invisible MC shouted.

Contented faces nodded as Eric stumbled toward the bathroom.

"What's the good word, friends?" the MC yelled joyfully.

"You never had it so good!" the family chorused.

.. "Right!"

Eric stumbled over The Bug and crashed into the wall. He stared at the beetle-shaped monster scuttling about, a cute electronic gadget activated by light with two blinking bulb-eyes on the ends of jointed cable stocks. The Bug came mewling out of its closet when you got up out of bed. It scanned everything, then started butting its head against buttons, starting the coffee maker bubbling, turning on the shower, pulling curtains, and finally whirring into the baby's room and butting the console by little Ralph's bubblebath so that the needle flicked over to "Day Care."

LATER, under the shower spray, Eric thought in a rising panic, of running out on his five-year contract with *Happy-Day*. But he knew that was ridiculous. He would be picked up in a few hours at the most by Intercorporate Feds.

His being trapped at *Happy-Day* was much more complex and subtle than the mere legality of a signed contract. Anyone rejecting the perfectly wonderful and secure community of a Company was automatically considered, at best, a psychoneurotic needing treatment, and in most cases a total misfit who could expect nothing less than tranquilizing in a Company clinic. Most people were Company and being secure and se-

rene themselves, and also constituting a democratic majority, they had to condemn anyone who was the least anti-Company.

The government was pro-Company. The law was Intercorporate. The Companies had their own psychologists who gave you the tests, evaluated them and delivered your prognosis. Their criteria for judging your sanity was simple. Were you or were you not happily, cooperatively, harmoniously, cheerfully adjusted to the Company?

It seemed to make sense. Who could argue against it? Who would want to argue against it? The Companies provided everything. Security and happiness from the cradle to the grave.

The Companies were benevolent. They only wanted you to be happy. They tested you and decided exactly how you should live in order to operate at the optimum of happiness and adjustment. For what was best for you was best for the Company and vice versa.

When Eric signed up at *Happy-Day* he was tested thoroughly and categorized. The Company Personology Clinic knew Eric's exact liquor tolerance. How many filtered cigarettes he could smoke a day. How many push-ups and knee-bends he could perform each day at the Happy Gym. How much sex-fun he could justify in each

week. His correct diet down to caloric decimals. They even knew how many times his heart could be expected to beat until it stopped.

He was screened through days and nights of personality testing. Aptitude, interests, marital adjustment charts, orthodoxy of political beliefs, willingness to take orders without inward resentment, ambitiousness, dependent or independent, sociable or unsociable, dominant or submissive, extroverted, stable, aggressive, loyal—

Eric hadn't, he thought, done so well on these tests, but he had tried to develop a correct adjustment behavior. The social pressure was the most effective. You simply felt like a freak feeling lousy when everybody else was happy. And after enough of that kind of feeling you became desperate to belong.

Eric wanted desperately to belong, consciously at least, but in the beginning, before realizing how important was conformity, he goofed in a number of ways. Gotten crooked at a Company social. Raised hell at a Community Sing. Smoked too much. Been late for work. Yelled back at Mr. Quell. Even tried to get fresh with a cute secretary over in Wing 4.

And now he hadn't gotten his nine hours sleep. Eric didn't mind doing everything possible in an attempt to reach the norm of happy ad-

justment. But the idea of being tranquilized, that was something else. He knew that he would rather be a non-Company misfit bumming around outside than be tranquilized. You hardly even knew who you were then, and didn't care about anything much one way or another. It didn't seem to Eric as though Betty or old man Sloane cared very much even about being happy a'l the time.

Eric ran out of the shower and stood shivering before the drying air that came whisshing out of the wall. What could he do?

Already he could see Mr. Quell, shaking Eric's hand soon as he got to the office, patting him on the back, smiling, assuring him that the Company was looking out for Eric, even if Eric wasn't, that the Company knew what was best for Eric's future, and then leading Eric right off to the Clinic.

One time in the office, before Eric could control his feelings, he got the idea of how pleasant it would be to wring Mr. Quell's thick neck. Eric had gone around in a high state of anxiety for hours because every desk was equipped with a delicate little instrument that registered excessive inner emotional upsets, and he was sure his fantasies concerning Mr. Quell had registered and been relayed into Personology.

They probably had been.

But none of those things mattered now. What could he do?

He realized how healthy he looked in the mirror as the paste ate away his beard stubble. Tanned in the Company solarium, in perfect physical condition from Company directed work-outs in the Gym, Company diets, and formulae living.

He had no case whatever for trying to run away from *Happy Day*. Running away from perfect health, happiness and security could only mean that he was crazy.

But he wanted to run away, run out on his contract. He wouldn't escape the Intercompany Feds, but at least he would have the wistful satisfaction of having tried.

Then he thought of Betty and little Ralph. How could he run out on his family? Frustrated rage was so intense that he could see his temples swelling and his face turning pink.

He ran through the living room. Betty wouldn't wake up until the alarm told her it was time. A bomb going off under the floor wouldn't wake Betty up before the alarm signaled the Company's approval.

The Bug hummed between Eric's legs, darted across the scuff-proof wax of the kitchen floor and began butting against breakfast preparation buttons.

Eric walked stiffly into little Ralph's room where the baby lay wide awake and

smiling as he floated blissfully in his tank of bubble-bath. Little Ralph gazed serenely up into the tevee screen that hung face down from the ceiling, filled with meaningless attention-fixing patterns in color, designed by the child psychologists at the Company Clinic, not to sooth a baby's discomfort, but to nip even the germ of discontent in the bud.

Little Ralph had never cried, never objected to anything. Little Ralph had never stopped smiling and gurgling and cooing with contentment. The amniotic-like milky fluid in the tank rotated with constant soothing gentleness around the baby buoyed up by colored rings, carrying off little Ralph's tensions and waste materials with equal efficiency, at the same time providing him through some kind of ingenious osmosis with many vital dietetic essentials. It also adjusted automatically so that little Ralph's body temperature remained constant.

Eric's panic increased as he looked at little Ralph. His legs felt weak. His *Happy-Day* uniform felt damp with perspiration.

He had been responsible for his kid's conception, but that was strictly all. Little Ralph was a company product, the same as its twenty-two brands of the world's most eaten breakfast cereal. He had timidly thought so before, and now he had nothing to lose by

openly admitting it. Little Ralph was born in the Company clinic. He would graduate from his bubble-bath into the Company nursery school, then into Company grade-school, then into the Company's industrial training school. Little Ralph's training would emphasize cooperativeness, group-spirit, Company patriotism, conformity and homogeneity, and only *Happy-Day* knew what else.

He would always smile. He would always be serene. He would never get even one demerit. He would never even know he was happy. He would just *be* happy the rest of his life. And at the correct moment he would be retired to the Company's barracks for the aged, a stone's throw from the nursery, and when he died he would be taken in a Company car to the Company crematorium and buried in the Company cemetery without ever having had a worry or an unpleasant moment from his bubble-bath to his grave.

But on the theory that ignorance was bliss, little Ralph would be spared of knowing the difference. That's my trouble, Eric thought. I've been raised non-Company, and I know the difference. The next generation would have an easy time.

Eric stood, impotent and feeling too hopeless even to nourish anger. His throat thickened and he involuntari-

ly reached out to touch little Ralph. An alarm buzzed. He jumped, jerked his hand away. The tevee screen hanging up there worked both ways. The nurses in the Clinic watched little Ralph all the time. Eric and Betty could never touch. Everything was taken care of. Everything for the convenience of the employees of *Happy-Day*.

He ignored the *Happy-Day* cereal. The Bug had butted into a plastic bowl. He ran out into the pre-dawn chill under a clear sky, not wanting to stay and watch Betty wake up and move placidly around before going in to spend the rest of the day just sitting and looking at little Ralph and cooing to him and never touching anything.

The sun was just moving up over the top of the chrome and glass of Wing 4. Wing 4 was still ensconced in dead silence, waiting for the bell. Wing 5, an earlier factory shift, was stirring.

Eric looked over the green lawn of the Company's housing tract. He had an hour and a half yet before he was supposed to get up. An hour after that he was supposed to be in his office. He had two hours to get as far as possible from *Happy-Day* before his absence was registered.

And that, he now allowed himself to realize, was what he intended to do.

The Duster whirled past Eric, headed around the curv-

ing walk on its rubber tires. It was electronically equipped and was spraying the air, buildings and grass with an invisible powder that sought out the smallest traces of dirt and pulled them out with a powerful magnetic charge.

Eric turned, started walking fast away from the line of buildings covering fifty acres of *Happy-Day* Housing tract and kept on walking even faster across the open field of grass and stubble, a quarter of a mile wide, that led over to the river hidden behind thick curtains of cottonwood and willow trees.

He started running through the dew-wet grass. Quail fluttered ahead of him making shrill piping sounds. A ground squirrel ducked into a hole. Grasshoppers whirled back and forth past his face.

He began remembering how it had been, all those years non-Company. Suddenly it seemed as though he had been Company a lot longer than five months. It was as though he was afraid to remember how it had been before.

After his mother died when he was a kid, he had stayed with his father and his uncle and for years he had been just another migrant worker, sometimes doing a little placer mining up in the Northwest, bumming around, living in tents and shacks and sometimes sleeping under the stars. He received an exceptionally good education to be

non-Company. He got that from his uncle who had been a well-educated man before the Companies really took over. But his education was general and had little to do with what a person learned in a Company.

Then when he was almost thirty, he met Betty Ferguson, the daughter of a dirt-farmer way up on the Canadian border. She had never even seen a Company, but she had heard about them.

When later they would drive by a shining chrome and glass Company tract Betty would stare at it, and finally she said like someone wishing on the moon, "Gee, wouldn't it be nice to be in a Company. Sleep in those nice apartments, and have one of those kitchens that do everything."

Eric couldn't remember what he said, except that he hadn't said yes or no.

"And never have to worry about anything and always have good things to eat and nice places to work and where everybody is so friendly to one another all the time."

Eric had been in conflict about it. His father and his uncle and most of the non-Company people he'd always known had been violently opposed to Companies. All they had to say about it was that a man ought to be free to live and think as he pleased.

Until now their arguments had never made any sense to Eric, because never having

been Company, he didn't know the difference.

He knew now.

But before joining *Happy-Day*, Eric hadn't been at all sure of anything much. Most of the population was Company. Non-Company included mostly what appeared to be out and out misfits—bums, prospectors, dirt and ocean farmers, criminals, rebels and anarchists and back-country people. There were also a few professional people who served non-Company, doctors, artisans and the like, who for some reason had never approved of Companies. But Eric had felt loutish, especially after Betty started talking about how much better off people were in the Companies. He got to thinking that most non-Company people protested against the Companies only to justify their own feelings of being misfits and outcasts and general no-goods.

Eric had finally got to feeling pretty self-conscious and ashamed of being non-Company. Just the same maybe he would never have signed up with *Happy-Day* if Betty hadn't gotten pregnant.

That was when the pressure started really building up in Eric to sign up with a Company. Betty's nudgings really started to hurt. What about our future? What about our child's future? In a Company we'd have everything. Our child would have the best of

food, and hospital care, and everything, an education and nice playmates. We'd have some respect.

The only argument Eric could have put up was his Uncle's—about freedom. And it didn't seem to make any sense. Freedom of what? The people living in those fancy Company guilds had everything. What was this freedom?

Eric and Betty found out. Now it was too late for everybody and maybe Betty and those like her were lucky because she had been tranquilized and no longer knew that she knew.

Betty had seemed happy at *Happy-Day*, adjusted, getting very few demerits—until little Ralph was born. That was when Betty knew. She began to know when little Ralph was installed in his bubble-bath. She had broken into the clinic and attacked one of the nurses before they got her and took her into the ward for a two-day shot of tranquility.

After a few days of tranquilizing treatment, Betty was happy. She just sat beside little Ralph's bubble-bath all day, smiling and cooing, not much different from little Ralph when you got to thinking about it.

Once Eric stopped running across the field. He stood looking back at *Happy-Day*. It sure looked fine. It seemed perfect from the outside and

even on the inside it was hard to understand what was wrong with it. It was beautiful the way it caught the morning sun and shone so brightly.

A three-hundred-foot spire rose up above the main office building in the center of the tract. A huge animated neon sign on top of the spire said:

**HAPPY-DAY CEREAL
COMPANY**

Under it was a company motto that blinked off and on constantly, and it said:

**YOU NEVER HAD IT SO
GOOD**

A huge animated neon cartoon showed a giant laughing joyful kid's face as he ate forever out of a bowl providing an inexhaustible supply of *Happy-Day* breakfast food.

Under that was another slogan saying:

**WHAT'S GOOD FOR THE
COMPANY IS GOOD FOR
YOU**

The huge neon display could be seen thirty miles away at night. Eric looked up at the exuberantly eating *Happy-Day* Kid shoveling in the breakfast food. He not only had it good but he had all he could eat. He never ran out. And apparently he didn't want anything else.

Eric realized now that it was a great deal more that the *Happy-Day* Kid was swallowing up there night and day than just doctored wheat containing protein, vitamin D, vitamin B1, vitamin B2, vita-

min C, Niacinamide, vitamin B12, copper-iron, folacin, calcium, phosphorus, and iodine. That kid was swallowing a way of thinking and of living. He was absorbing chrome and glass and company school and swimming pool and playground and company library and security and retirement and streamlined serenity from the cradle to the grave.

But Eric knew that he lacked one essential freedom. The freedom not to be contented, happy and free of worry if you didn't want to.

It might not make any sense even now when you tried to explain it. But when you felt it you knew what it meant.

He turned, ran on into the cottonwoods and stopped in the shade. He smelled the familiar odor of early-morning woodsmoke rising from open fires, bacon cooking, and thin bluish smoke drifting over the trees. He heard voices, laughter, somewhere down river.

"Good morning, neighbor," a voice drawled. Eric jumped, started to run, then felt rage at his own fear. He looked at the river man. He knew river men well enough to know one from an Intercompany Fed.

"Neighbor," the river man drawled, "I just said good morning."

"I heard you say it."

The river man was tall and gaunt and sun-burned to a reddish-brown. He wore only a pair of ragged faded over-

alls, no shoes, no hat. He was thin but his muscles were like twisted cable. He was whittling on a length of willow, peeling the bark.

Eric started to move past the river man. He'd been non-Company and he knew one thing—after you were Company you couldn't expect much sympathy from those who weren't. They didn't want to get involved with Intercorporate Feds. They wanted to be left alone. They looked on you with suspicion, contempt, and sometimes hatred.

"Maybe for you this ain't such a good morning," the river man said.

"That's my business whether it is or not."

"Well now I'm not disputing that even a little bit, son."

"Get out of the way."

"They's some Feds drifting around here looking for run-aways."

"There usually are."

"Looks like there's going to be too, for some time to come."

"I said to get out of the way."

"Hold your sweat up a little, boy. You can't escape a Fed."

"That's my worry."

"It sure is, son. Some worry too. You're a good healthy looking boy, and I for one would sort of hate to see you after they treated once over lightly what's inside your head."

The river man seemed to

know a lot about the inner workings of a Company clinic.

"Maybe I could sort of help you a little. You're in a tight predicament."

"Help me?" Eric felt like laughing, but not enough to laugh. "You?"

Birds flickered among the wet leaves as the river man kept on whittling.

"You know," the river man said, not looking up, "when a Company boy or girl gets out of his back yard and comes to the river, they've already helped themselves plenty. We sort of give them a hand—if they want it."

The implication was there that others beside Eric ran away to the river. As far as he knew no one in this Company ever had done it before him. He knew that once in a great while somebody ran away from a Company, but it was always from some other Company.

"My name's Shelby. What's yours?"

"Eric McClinton."

"Glad you walked over here, Clint. Being happy is a lot like having a harem. You can sometimes get too much of a darn good thing."

"What do you mean—help me?"

"A man's got to live sort of balanced out, Clint. He ought to have it kind of rough now and then. Once in a while he ought to get mad as a wet hen and rave and

tear around a little. To be real happy a man's got to swing clear over the other way once in a while—you know, be real sad, or mad, or just plain down in the dumps."

"Even if you could help me, why should you?"

"Why not, son? What's good for the Companies isn't so good in some ways for us on the outside. We don't want the Company brand of happy pap fed to us, but we ought to have a lot more of a few things we do want. The Companies run things. We're a minority out here and we don't have any say in how the country's run."

"Is helping me, if you could, going to change anything?"

"We don't know. We're trying though—and maybe it's good if we can just keep a few from getting any worse."

"All right, but you can't help me any. So get out of the way."

Shelby stood up, spraddling the path. He dropped the willow branch and he gave Eric a sneering grin. "Listen here, Company-boy. You sound mighty uppity and I don't like the sound. You'd maybe like to put me out of the way."

Eric started to swing at Shelby's grinning face. A peculiar hollow tension exploded out of his stomach and he was swinging before he

had any idea of swinging, and he was so afraid, he felt faint. He had led a rough life before signing up with *Happy-Day*, and had his share of rough-and-tumble brawls and had never been much afraid of anything. Now he felt a draining fear and then a rising rage because he was afraid.

The ground slammed into his face. He heard Shelby standing over him laughing, a bare foot grinding into Eric's back, jamming his face into the rotting leaves. "All right now, Company-boy," Shelby laughed. "What you doing crawling on your belly that way?"

Eric kicked and tried to turn over. The foot bore down on his neck. He heard Shelby howl, "Reckon the Company's took all the guts out of you, boy. Or maybe you was behind the door when they was given out."

Eric's face turned red, then pale with rage. He started screaming and yelling. "I'll kill you."

"Hell, boy, you couldn't kill a crippled cockroach."

Eric got hold of Shelby's ankle, twisted, got to his feet and jumped for him. He went stiff as he felt Shelby's knife point tickling his breast bone. "Company-boy," Shelby said softly, "you get any nastier with me and I'll cut your brisket open and string you up like a butchered hog."

Trembling, spitting dirt

and leaves out of his mouth, Eric whispered, "What do you want? You said you wanted to help me."

"You start walking ahead of me," Shelby said. "You walk on down to the river, turn left. I got a barge there and you walk on up the gangplank and don't get uppity."

A M U D D Y path cut through thick cattails and reeds next to the river's heavy flow of yellow. Up river were several dilapidated houseboats and smaller boats. Figures moved around open fires. He heard women's laughter. A guitar was playing.

Eric went up the gangplank and Shelby told him to stop by the open hatch near the prow. It was a water-logged hulk, timbers rotting, soggy boards covered with moss. A putrid pile of dead fish lay there by a coiled hawser collecting flies. A shack was built amidships, full of cracks, with a dirty cot inside and a stove made out of an oil drum.

"Start climbing down there, Company-boy," Shelby said, encouraging him with a dig of the knife. "Right down the hatch."

Eric, still weak and shaking, climbed down the rope ladder. A hatch cover slid into place, and he was in absolute blackness. He stumbled, fell on his face in a slimy mess. He crouched on his

knees, then started to get up. He couldn't see a thing. But he heard a quick excited burst of breath near him. A voice spoke almost directly into his face.

"Don't try to get away. Just stay—just stay and fight."

The voice had a hissing vicious murderous intent in it that sent a shiver all over Eric's back. He heard the lunging drive coming, felt the blows whooshing past his face in the dark. He tried to break out of range, but something hit him on the side of the head and he fell half stunned on the floor. He slid his hand up the bulkhead, found a broken board and dragged himself up toward his feet. He felt the sudden rain of vicious blows in his belly, his chest, over his heart, in his face. A knee in his crotch, and this time when he went down, he felt shoes kicking him in the ribs.

"Get up, get up and make it good. Fight it right you—"

Eric, who thought he was familiar with a variety of profanity, realized now that he wasn't. He managed to get his arms around a couple of kicking legs, heaved the man over backward, following up the advantage, and getting in some good knocks of his own.

The man twisted under him, snarled and yelled. Then both of them were rolling over in stinking water, pummeling one another, gouging at eyes,

digging at throats. Eric was only dimly conscious now of what he was doing and of what was being done to him. He had only one joyful idea in mind which was to strangle this guy to death. All he felt was a driving passion of rage, hate, a shivering joy at the thought of strangling, ripping, tearing and beating somebody to death and stomping all over their remains.

He fell backward over loose boards. He was wedged helplessly in a pile of soggy planks. A hand spread over his face, fingers started trying to dig his eye out of its socket. Eric closed his teeth on the man's thumb. The man howled and jerked away.

Sometime later Eric saw that the hatch was open. Light shone down on his face. He dimly remembered the invisible opponent climbing out of the hatch screaming about his thumb. Now Shelby called down. "All right, you can come out now, Company-boy."

Eric moaned as he moved up the ladder. His body throbbed like a boil.

On the top deck of the barge, Eric would have fallen down if Shelby hadn't held him up.

"A hell of a way to help somebody," Eric said thickly.

"Now you toddle on back to the Company," Shelby said. He gave Eric a little shove toward the gangplank. "You don't have much time."

"I don't intend going back there."

"You'd best do that," Shelby said seriously.

"They're going to turn me into a grinning vegetable." Eric mumbled.

"Things ain't so black yet as you think, boy," Shelby said. "They won't be giving you the happy pills yet. You go on back and you'll see."

"How the devil do you know?"

"I know, boy. You run away, you know damn well you'll get the treatment. I'm telling you to go back there now and you'll be all right for a while. You got to believe me and get going. Or you'll be in real trouble. They's ways to bull it through and in a few years you can get yourself and your family out legally. Now get going."

He shoved Eric down the gangplank. For reasons not hard to define, Eric believed Shelby. For one reason, he saw someone running back across the field toward *Happy Day*. And he knew that his recent opponent had been here before. From Shelby's hint, he knew that a number of others had paid visits to Shelby's barge. For another reason, Eric felt good. He hadn't felt so good in months. He even felt a tinge of hope. Hope for himself and for a lot of others.

The point was that there existed an opportunity to escape from *Happy Day* for a little while, whenever he

wanted and needed to do it. And that little while might make all the difference. A man might be able to hold out.

But then there were all those demerits. Still, he trusted Shelby, and he kept thinking of the other guy running back toward *Happy-Day*.

Anyway, Shelby was right. If he ran out he was sure to get the final happy treatment.

BY THE time he washed up and changed clothes in his apartment and got into the office building he was five minutes late. Another demerit now couldn't hurt anything. A man only died once.

As he walked through several sliding doors toward the inner office, he read the familiar slogans: *It's easier to smile than to frown. Courtesy is golden. Prosperity for all is the garden of glad hearts. You never had it so good. What's good for the Company is good for you. Love for your Company is self-respect. We know what's good for you. Leave it to Happy-Day.* And so forth.

"Whenever you're feeling too happy, boy," Shelby had called out after him, "come back and see me."

Over the inner-office door was the permanent reminder:

BE HAPPY—YOU'RE
LUCKY

His office group behind their rows of shiny desks smiled at him as he came in.

If they noticed his cut lip, and the bruise on his cheek, they dared not react with anything but happy smiles.

"Good morning," they chorused.

"Good morning, friends," Eric said. He managed a painful smile. Immediately that he sat down at his desk, the speaker box near his typewriter said, "Mr. Quell would enjoy speaking with you, Mr. McClinton."

Eric stood up stiffly. His stomach turned over. This was it. Tranquility forever. Move over, old man Sloane, Betty, little Ralph, I'll soon be chortling with you in our great big bubble-bath. We've never had it so good.

Mr. Quell, the office manager, was a big man in the usual good condition characteristic of *Happy-Day* employees. But as Eric walked into Mr. Quell's office and shut the door, he noticed that Mr. Quell's lip was cut, one of his ears slightly mangled, and his left eye considerably darker than the other.

Also as he reached out to shake hands, his right thumb still glared with the red imprints of human teeth.

Mr. Quell smiled serenely. "I just wanted to point out to you, Mr. McClinton, that you have accumulated a number of demerits indicating a certain lack of developing group-feeling, and the kind of conformity that makes for adjusted communal living."

"Thank you, Mr. Quell."

"However, don't worry about it, Mr. McClinton. I'm sure you will make a good and happy adjustment. Just be happy, you're lucky." He put his arm over Eric's shoulder and showed him back to the door. He whispered in Eric's ear. "I've been up against damn near everybody in *Happy-Day*, and you're the roughest customer yet." The smile

fled a moment from Mr. Quell's face. He added, "I'll get around to you again real soon, friend, and next time I'll really wrap you up."

"Likewise," Eric said. Mr. Quell winked as Eric shut the door.

Later Eric got to thinking that there might even be a chance for Betty and little Ralph—once he got them out of *Happy-Day*.

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the explanation

by GEORGE WHITLEY

WE WERE talking that night about flying saucers—"we" being the Westernport Science Fiction Club. Don't get the idea that all science fiction fans are believers in flying saucers—take it from me, they're not. Furthermore, the big majority of them take a very dim view of those gentlemen who claim to have met real live Martians, Venusians or whatever who have made the voyage to Earth in their lenticulate spacecraft. Such published absurdities give science fiction an undeserved bad name—undeserved, because no real science fiction writer would ever entertain the idea that either Mars or Venus could support beings even remotely human in physical characteristics.

We were talking about flying saucers that night mainly because of a new addition to our club library—THE REPORT ON UNIDENTIFIED FLYING OBJECTS, by Rupert. It's a fascinating book, and leaves one with the impression that there just might be something behind the saucer sightings. Browning—one of our members whose tastes in reading have always run more to fantasy than to sci-

We weren't sorry when a halt was called. It was rough work hacking your way through that jungle.

Have you seen any men with tails—or any flying saucers—recently? George Whitley, the pseudonym of a prominent British SF writer who has mixed feelings about UFOs reports on an expedition to the back parts of Papua and the discovery there of a decidedly unusual lost tribe.

ence fiction proper—maintained that Ruppelt, with his admission that 23% of the sightings remain inexplicable, makes it quite obvious that the saucers are of extra-Terran origin. He maintained too that many of the sightings explained by various authorities have never been explained, but only explained away.

It was, I'm afraid, a very uneven argument—Browning versus nine of us. We just refused even to consider the possibility that the saucers might be visitants from Outer Space. We just refused to believe that there was not some natural, and obvious, explanation for every sighting. We just laughed at the idea that any sort of space travel was possible without conventional rocket drive. Browning's idea of a combined gyroscope and bar magnet whiffing along the lines of magnetic force was, to us, just ludicrous.

The meeting had reached the stage of an Irish parliament—everybody talking and nobody listening—when Corrigan dropped in. Corrigan is the sub-editor of our local rag—THE WESTERN-PORT TIMES AND HERALD—and writes science fiction, which he sometimes sells, in his spare time. He was not alone—the stranger with him was very much like him in feature but taller and thinner, and was tanned more deeply than any of us could be even by the end of the summer.

We were not surprised when Corrigan introduced the newcomer to us as his brother. He had talked often of his big brother Bill. Bill was the bright boy of the family and had graduated from local rags to the big city dailies and, as we had been told frequently, had succeeded in seeing a good deal of the more out of the way parts of the world at his employers' expense. He was, we were told after the introductions had been made, just back from Papua, where he had accompanied an expedition organized by one of the big oil companies.

"Is it true," asked Browning eagerly, "that there are still men with tails there?"

"I've never seen one," grinned Bill Corrigan. "But don't let me interrupt the argument you were having when we came in; it sounded like a good one. What was it all about?"

"Flying saucers," I said. "We don't believe in 'em—but Browning, here, does. He has a romantic nature. He even tries to make out that most of the explanations of saucer sightings aren't explanations at all, but merely explaining away..."

"They are so explaining away," maintained Browning, his fat face earnest. "What do you say, Mr. Corrigan?"

Bill Corrigan laughed.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I'm not an expert on flying saucers—or unidentified flying objects—or anything like these

days. All that I hope is that if there's a landing—a real, genuine, dinkum landing—I'm on hand with a good cameraman and a scad of reliable and reputable witnesses..."

"But what do you *think*, Mr. Corrigan?" persisted Browning.

"Drop it, Jack," I said. "We'll save the saucers for some other night. They'll keep. For once in our lives we have a distinguished guest to entertain—and I'm sure that all of us would rather listen to him than to your twaddle, even though he hasn't seen any men with tails, or flying saucers..."

I realized, too late, that I had been unforgivably rude to Browning, that the sort of talk that was common currency among ourselves would not impress strangers. Bill Corrigan ignored me—well, I deserved it—and addressed himself to Browning.

"Talking of flying saucers and such—I did find a lost tribe," he said quietly.

"What's that to do with flying saucers?" asked his brother.

"Let me tell the story *my* way," replied Corrigan, a slight edge to his voice. "Talking of flying saucers—I found a lost tribe. Period.

"It's a fascinating country, Papua," he went on. "There's so much of it that's never been explored, even with the use of aircraft. There may well be, tucked away in some inaccessible valley among the

mountains, a tribe of tailed men or a herd of animals that should have been extinct millions of years ago. There are rumors, of course, and every now and again somebody will stumble upon some Shangri La (James Hilton has a lot to answer for!) of which, unluckily for my profession, the inhabitants are very little different from the tribesmen living in more accessible localities.

"I don't know how much my brother has told you about me, but I'll put you into the picture in any case. I was sent along by my paper to accompany the Regal Oil Company's expedition into the interior. I've no need to tell you that in these days, bearing in mind the game of power politics being played in the middle East, oil is news.

"Bailey, the geologist, was in charge of the expedition. Besides myself, there were three other white men. We had, of course, the usual retinue of guides and carriers, and an interpreter who was supposed to be capable of handling conversations in any of the languages or dialects we were likely to encounter. Air cover had been arranged with the local airline, whose pilots had been asked to keep their eyes skinned for us and our signals.

"I could go into detail about our expedition—but it's all in my book, anyhow. Come to that—it's all in at least a dozen books. It was only at the

end that we strayed off the beaten track, and until then the peoples we encountered had all been well written up by anthropologists and others.

"It was on the banks of the Rainbow River—that's a good translation of the native name—that Bailey started to show signs of real interest. The cause of his rather more than mild excitement was obvious even to me—a film on the surface of the water that was iridescent in the rays of the sun. Bailey took samples and made tests, and declared that this shimmering film was mineral oil and that there must be a seepage into the river upstream from us.

"The manufacture of canoes from suitable logs took our bearers a remarkably short time—after little more than a day encamped by the river our expedition was waterborne. A dug-out canoe is not the most comfortable means of transport—but it's better than walking!

"All went well until we got to the rapids—and then our carriers went on strike. We thought at first that it was a strike for extra payment—a sort of portage bonus—but our interpreter soon made things clear. There were, it seemed, people living above the rapids, and our carriers were frightened of them. No, they weren't head hunters. They weren't cannibals. It was just that there was something dreadfully wrong with their way of life that was, as far as

we could gather from the interpreter, just looking for trouble. Not that there ever had been any trouble—but when it did strike it would be as well for innocent bystanders to be well clear.

"Bailey, as I have told you, is a geologist, not an ethnologist—but he was, I could see, intrigued by this vision of brown skinned Ajaxes defying the lightning. I was too, of course. We kept on questioning our interpreter as to just what was wrong with the people above the rapids, but he lacked the vocabulary to make himself clear. All that we could get out of him was the information that this hitherto undiscovered tribe made a practice of treading on the corns of both gods and devils and that, sooner or later, an alliance of supernatural powers would make a spectacular end to them.

"After a deal of discussion we decided to leave the carriers and the interpreter—they were immune to all inducements—at the foot of the rapids and to press on ourselves, carrying what we could in the way of provisions and equipment. It was a foolhardy decision—had not the interpreter been so sure about the pacific character of the people above the rapids we should never have made it.

"The going was tough. The climbing was bad enough by itself—having to hack our way through the jungle did not improve matters. We were not

sorry when Bailey called a halt that night. After a cold and scrappy meal out of tins we slept soundly, in spite of the pain of our various lacerations, contusions and abrasions, in spite of the vicious and hungry insects.

"The next day we climbed, and the next. All of us were beginning to dismiss the interpreter's story as so much moonshine—not that it much mattered, Bailey reminded us; we had still to discover the source of the seepage of oil into the river.

"It was on the morning of the fourth day that we reached, at last, the head of the rapids. We were all of us surprised by the quiet beauty of the valley and the lake that we found there. The landscape, too, had that *tamed* quality that one associates with Man—with Man at a certain minimal level of culture, that is. We could see the village from where we were—a sizable place, a mile or so away. The thin, blue smoke of cooking fires told us that it was inhabited.

"Bailey decided—and wisely—that it would not be good policy to stumble into the village looking like the wrecks we felt. We stripped and took it in turns to wash in the lake, at least two of us maintaining a careful watch all the time for crocodiles and possibly hostile natives. We washed our clothes and spread them in the sun to dry. We shaved. We made a leisurely meal of

the last of our provisions and some huge, ripe bananas that we found growing near our bathing place.

"It was in the early afternoon that we started walking towards the village along a well trodden trail. We proceeded with caution, alert for ambush, for pitfall. When we were about a quarter of a mile from the settlement a man came out to meet us, striding with the easy assurance of one who has lived in peace all his life and fears no man.

"He was tall, even by European standards, and he was naked except for a gold band around his left upper arm. His skin was very dark, but his features were more Caucasian than Melanesian.

"He said, when he was a few feet from us, 'Good afternoon, gentlemen—' It wasn't so much the words that puzzled me as the faint suggestion of dialect that I couldn't place at the time.

"He was, he told us courteously, the son of the Chief. He apologised for his father's failure to greet us in person—the old man, it seemed, was suffering from a slight hang-over. It was a pity that we had missed the party...

"What party?"

"The native was taken aback by our ignorance. All white men, his manner implied as he answered, should celebrate Burns Night...

"By this time we had reached the village. It was spotlessly clean. There were

no heaps of decaying garbage to offend the eye and nose. What few dogs we saw were plump and well cared for. Even more remarkable, the children neither ran from us in terror nor crowded around us in curiosity. Oh, they were curious enough, as were their mothers, but it was a *polite* sort of curiosity. The men, our guide informed us, were still indoors, still recovering from the celebration.

"The Chief's house was bigger than the others. It was, of course, built of wood, with a roof of native thatch. But it was, as were all the other houses, uncompromisingly plain and severe in appearance. There were no elaborate, gaudily painted carvings around the doorway. There were, amazingly, windows—not glazed, but filled with a sort of mosquito netting of native manufacture.

"Inside, the house was cool and clean. The room into which the Chief's son led us was airy and spacious. It was furnished in European style—there was a table, and there were chairs made out of bamboo. There was, even, a bookshelf along one wall. I edged close to this, got a good look at its contents. There was a volume of Burns' verse. There was Winwoode Reade's *THE MARTYRDOM OF MAN*. There was, in fact, a fine collection of late Victorian or early Edwardian rationalist literature.

"The Chief came in then—a portly old gentleman with snowy white hair. Like his son, he was naked. Like his son, he spoke perfect English with that hint of Scottish accent. Like his son, he displayed in his features a strong suggestion of European ancestry. His eyes were a rather faded, but startling, blue.

"He shook our hands in the European manner. He was glad, he said, of the excuse to take a hair of the dog that had bitten him the previous night. He clapped his hands, and a girl came in with a tray, fashioned from split bamboo, on which were bamboo drinking mugs and two earthenware jugs, one of them porous and sweating. In the porous jug was cool water. In the other was—whisky. Oh, it wasn't Scotch—but, believe it or not, those naked savages had succeeded in distilling a liquor that would pass for at least a medium-grade rye!

"As you can well imagine, I had my notebook out and my pencil ready. Oh, the Chief's son wanted us to tell him what was happening in the outside world, but the Chief himself was the type of old man who enjoys listening to the sound of his own voice. He was more than willing to tell us the history of his tribe. First of all, he enlightened us as to the reason for the bad reputation held by his people. It was, he said, because they were rationalists, believing in neither

totem nor tabu, god nor devil. 'Everything,' he assured us, 'everything has a rational explanation...' And as he talked I felt that the ghost of old David McInnes who, years ago, had stumbled upon this tribe, who had taught them his language and his own tribal customs, who had impressed upon them his own hard-headed respect for facts, who had married the Chief's daughter and become Chief himself, must be hovering over the village and smiling with more pride than the ghost of a missionary revisiting the scene of his spiritual triumphs—

"Oh, it was fascinating... The continuity of it all, even to the accent... And then, over the pleasant baritone of the Chief's voice, we heard another sound, a droning hum, swelling in intensity. Bailey got to his feet.

"'We must make a fire,' he said. 'A big fire, with plenty of smoke...'

"'A fire?' asked the Chief. 'But it isn't cold. It is not yet sunset...'

"'There's no time to waste.'"

"He led the way outside. The Chief, puzzled but still courteous, followed him. The rest of us followed the Chief.

"We could see the Dakota clearly; it was flying over the other side of the valley, the opposite shore of the lake. Men and women and children were standing in the single street of the village, looking at the aircraft. Some of them

were pointing at it. When they saw their Chief, however, they contrived to ignore the aeroplane most elaborately.

"'What do you want a fire for?' asked the Chief again, obviously puzzled, yet determined to gratify the wishes of this unreasonable guest.

"'I want to make a signal to the big iron bird.'"

"Well, we've heard a lot lately about U and Non-U words and phrases—and 'big iron bird', in this part of Papua at least, seemed to be most definitely Non-U. The Chief gave Bailey a look that said, more plainly than any words, that he had let the side down with a resounding crash.

"'To the aeroplane, then,' said Bailey.

"'A signal?' asked the Chief. 'To... To propitiate it?'

"'Of course not!' Bailey was dancing up and down with impatience. 'I want to tell them where we are. Then they'll come and drop stores, and equipment...'

"'Then you are going to propitiate it,' said the old man. 'Mr. Bailey, I'm shocked. I thought that all men were rationalists...'

"'What the hell has rationalism got to do with it?'

"'Everybody knows,' said the Chief reasonably, 'that those things aren't gods or devils. They may be only cloud formations, they may be a sort of mirage—but there must be a rational explanation!'"



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